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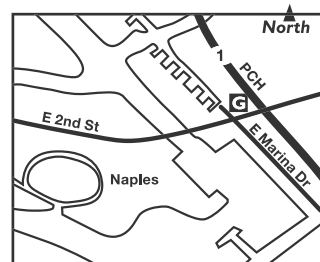
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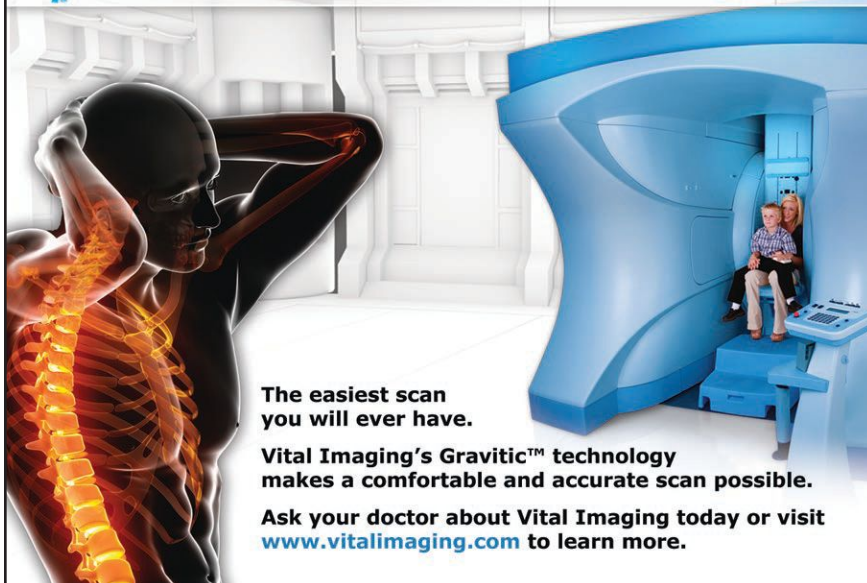
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Costa Mesa's Mystery Pot Shop

A year after the city got the DEA to raid legit dispensaries, one remains open—and no one knows why
BY NICK SCHOU

At first glance, there was nothing unusual about the brief news item that appeared in the July 5 issue of the *Daily Pilot*: “A Costa Mesa man was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs after he crashed his SUV into a medical-marijuana dispensary.” The driver, a 68-year-old man behind the wheel of a 2013 Mitsubishi Outlander, smashed “into the front entrance of Newport Mesa Health Center, 524 W. 19th St., Unit B, about 3:30 p.m.,” the newspaper reported. “The car went clear to the back end of the business.”

Because nobody was harmed in the incident, the story might have ended there. Some readers might have chuckled over the irony of a drunk driver colliding into a pot club. But to one reader, the story came as a complete shock.

Costa Mesa had banned medical-marijuana dispensaries in 2005, and seven years later, after unsuccessfully trying to force collectives to shut down, the city had called in the federal government to do the job. In January 2012, the DEA raided several clubs and sent letters threatening to file charges against operators and landlords who didn't leave town by the end of the month. So how could it be possible that while every other storefront had fled Costa Mesa, one club had managed to stay open, operating in plain sight, even surviving a collision with a drunk driver?

The reader in question happened to be the former operator of another dispensary in the city who asked to remain anonymous for this article. That collective catered to seriously ill patients, received referrals from local hospitals and took pains to strictly follow the California Attorney General's guidelines on complying with the state's medical-marijuana law; when the city told it to shut down, the collective did so voluntarily. After reading the *Daily Pilot* story, the owner paid a visit to the police department and demanded some answers.

First, the owner met with Lieutenant Mark Manley, the point person for enforcing the city's ban on dispensaries, as well as an attorney working with the city. “They told me I could not reopen because of federal law,” the former dispensary owner told the *Weekly*. When asked why Newport Mesa Health Center was being allowed to operate, the owner claims another officer pointed at a stack of paperwork on his desk, all of which were unsolved cases of serious crimes such as murder. “If you open,” the officer reportedly stated, “I will not have



time to bother you. . . . We will ignore you also.”

“I wasn't the only operator who asked questions of the city,” the former owner says. “Other collective operators and attorneys did, too. But nobody wanted to answer any questions about that club.”

Attorney Christopher Glew represented several dispensaries that were forced out of Costa Mesa by the city last year. He expressed shock that officials would allow a club to continue operating after being alerted to its presence. “The city of Costa Mesa spent a lot of money in legal fees and court costs and enforcement proceedings to shut down the dispensaries that were operating aboveboard and in compliance with state law,” he said. “We tried proposing regulations and tax schemes, and [the city] shot down everything, so the fact that people are drawing attention to a club and the city still isn't doing anything is beyond bizarre.”

The *Weekly* attempted to get answers about Costa Mesa's policy on cannabis clubs, but telephone calls to Manley and City Attorney Tom Duarte went unanswered. While it's certainly possible the city is too busy to deal with what appears to be the only marijuana dispensary still operating in plain sight,

a closer examination by the *Weekly* suggests that nothing about Newport Mesa Health Center holds up to even the slightest scrutiny.

The dispensary, which filed articles of incorporation on Feb. 4, 2011, voluntarily dissolved just four months later, on June 17, claiming it had no assets. The person who signed the paperwork was Blessing Apkofure, an anesthesiologist of Nigerian descent. (Efforts to reach her at the collective were unsuccessful, although an employee acknowledged she occasionally stopped by.) In any case, the California Board of Equalization states it has no sellers' permit on file for the collective.

Also, there's the dispensary's address: 524 W. 19th St. It's unusual because a review of title searches by the *Weekly* shows that, while there is a 524 W. 19th St. in Santa Ana and Huntington Beach, there isn't one in Costa Mesa. The building in which Newport Mesa Health Center operates (even though it shouldn't) is part of a somewhat-dilapidated strip mall that also houses a *taquería*, a pool hall and a smoke shop. On three separate occasions, a *Weekly* reporter was able to purchase marijuana inside after providing a valid doctor's note and a California driver's license. However, at no point

during the three visits was the reporter asked to sign a membership form for the cannabis collective, as required by state law. The other customers present each time personified the stereotype of the non-medical smoker, with almost all of them being young, often heavily tattooed men with no discernible ailments.

Property records show the landlord is a Costa Mesa resident named Antonio L. Caselini, whose name turns up in numerous civil lawsuits. According to a 1993 civil lawsuit, Caselini is actually an alias; his real name is Safar Bahkshi. A 1984 property record shows that “Caselini” handed over a Huntington Beach property that year to his wife, Roberta Bahkshi.

Reached by telephone this week, Caselini refused to answer any questions and immediately hung up the phone. In a subsequent conversation, he acknowledged being Newport Mesa Health Center's landlord, but he claimed the dispensary had already moved and that “attorneys were handling the matter.” Then he hung up again. However, just minutes before that call, the *Weekly* telephoned the dispensary and spoke to an employee. It was still open for business.

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ask a mexican!®»

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DEAR MEXICAN: I'm a *pocha* immigration attorney. I have so many questions for you I'm thinking I should just hire you as a consultant. Why do Mexicans

seem to want me to lie to them and steal their money and tell them they can become residents even when it's hopeless? Why can't Mexicans answer yes-or-no questions with a "yes" or "no"? Why do they have to give me long narratives that make no sense? If Mexicans claim that part of the reason they don't want to be in Mexico is because of government corruption, then why do they ask me to lie for them and help them to lie? Why are *polleros* the rudest, most aggressive clients a lawyer could ever have? Why don't *mexicanas* want a female attorney, while *mexicanos* seem to think it's kind of cool? When I go into fast-food restaurants in my power suits and order tacos, why do the *mexicanas* selling me the food giggle and make fun? Why can't they just be happy and proud for one of their own? When I tell a Mexican that I don't think their case is winnable, why do they change from using "*usted*" with me to "*tu*"? When I tell a Mexican bad news, why can't I just speak normally in Spanish? Why is it that I get so nervous that my *pocha* accent comes out super-strong?

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DEAR WABETTE: If people want to hire me as a consultant, I charge by the hour, with payments acceptable in tacos, tequila bottles and Chicano Studies books. So let's *empezar* your bill starting . . . *ahorita*. Mexicans want you to tell them they can become residents because they are paying you to make their hopeless situation a legal one, lies or not. Their "long narratives that make no sense" are otherwise known as America's immigration system. They ask you to lie for them because the alternative is going back to Mexico's cesspool of corruption—again, it's your job as an immigration attorney to make the hopeless hopeful by making the impossible happen, ethics be damned. *Polleros* are going to be rude because they're criminals—and outside of Dan-

iel Stern's character in *Born in East L.A.*, do you know of any gentleman human smugglers? *Mexicanas* not wanting you to represent them isn't a *pocha* thing, but a female thing, so go write to Jezebel about that one; Mexican men wanting you as an attorney, in turn, is all about an *hombre* ogling you. As a *pocha*, you shouldn't be eating fast food in the first place—and the *mexicana-on-pocha* hate is another female issue that Jezebel can answer. When a Mexican switches from addressing you as *usted* to *tu*, it's because you're no longer someone deserving of their respect, but the shyster scamming them out of cash. Finally, you start talking like a *pocha* when you tell them the bad news because you don't like delivering bad news—that's understandable. Let's see . . . carry over the *dos*, add three, include a first-timer discount, and your final legal bill with me is a *taquero* for 30 people, a bottle of ON Tequila and a first-edition autographed copy of *Occupied America*. Pleasure doing business!

DEAR MEXICAN: Why do so many Mexican parents let their kids play in the street unsupervised? I'm sure this practice isn't limited to Mexicans, but it seems as though some neighborhoods are filled with Mexican kids playing in the streets, not paying attention to traffic (no matter how quiet the street might be) and with no parents in sight. Are these parents lazy, stupid or encouraging self-reliance?

Whitey

DEAR GABACHO: Every *chamaco* is going to be a different story, but the main reason Mexicans let their kids play on the street is because there's nowhere else for them to play. The lack of park spaces in barrios is an unfortunate phenomenon well-known to city planners and best examined in Cal State Los Angeles professor David R. Diaz's influential *Barrio Urbanism: Chicanos, Planning and American Cities*. Compounding that is that most landlords in barrios don't allow kids to play in common areas, leading families to let them loose onto the mean streets. ¿Triste, no?

ASK THE MEXICAN

at themexican@askamexican.net, be his fan on Facebook, follow him on Twitter or ask him a video question at youtube.com/askamexicano!

HEY YOU!

» ANONYMOUS

Find a Bed!

You were the idiot taking a nap in a parked car with the engine running next to a neighborhood park, and you actually had the nerve to be angry when a good Samaritan came by to check on your unbelievably stupid, thoughtless behavior. I don't suppose children at the park or anyone walking by would like to breathe air instead of your exhaust fumes, not to mention the danger you put your own child (and others) in by leaving the engine on while napping. YOU are the lucky one, my dear. If I had been the one to find you, I would have woken up both you and your child . . . but not before calling the police to check on you to make sure you were not drunk. Next time you need a nap, find a damn bed!

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High Art

Meet the masters of the functional glassblowing trade
—by which we mean bong

BY SARAH BENNETT

Adam Whobery is doing what he has done for the better part of a decade: concentrating deeply while staring into a flame.

The thirtysomething craftsman, wearing a black cutoff T-shirt and a pair of custom didymium shades, is standing in an industrial roll-up he shares with other glassblowers as he quietly turns thin rods of colored borosilicate into yet another impossibly detailed, sculptural work of art, one that will most likely sell for thousands of dollars.

Unlike most of his previous pieces—which have recently included hand-held replicas of hot rods, Nike Dunks and Wolverine action figures—the delicate rodent wheel he is constructing in this Garden Grove office park will soon become part of a larger conceptual art piece titled *Mind Over Matter*.

As with all of Whobery's work, however, it will also be functional—you will be able to smoke out of it.

"Even if I make a big artistic piece, I'll still hide a pipe in it," says Whobery, who sells his high-end functional art under the name "Hoobs." "My goal over the next few years is to develop my voice as a sculptor. I want to make things that say something... but the pipe community is where it all started, so you can't deny that either."

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



DUSTIN AMES

For nearly three decades, American pipers such as Whobery have been driving innovation and doing striking technical work in the field of lamp-worked glass. But the folk-art roots and illicitness of their chosen media's functionality has kept their art largely out of the public eye, as well as earning snubs from more traditional glass artists who, as with most people outside of the scene, can't look past the fact there is a bowl inside it.

When Whobery started attaching sculptural extras to his colorful glass pipes as a South Bay twentysomething in the early aughts, most smoke shops were still buying mass-produced Chinese bongs; there wasn't much room for locally made pieces with an elevated price point.

Specialty glass stores wouldn't sell them, and, of course, museums wouldn't display them. In order to make a living, many—including Whobery—turned to a national network of so-called pipers, who thrived on online sales and word-of-mouth promotion to continue growing their craft.

But as marijuana legalization becomes a reality across the country for both medical and recreational use, these artists are beginning to emerge from their underground community, encouraged by a growing number of collectors, head shops and art galleries now seeking to promote and encourage this uniquely American vocation.

"There are people who are still blind and don't accept us just on principle," says Steve Hoppenfeld, a.k.a. "Hops," who makes his high-end glass pipes in the same industrial unit as Whobery. "But we're not just stoners making whatever. We're coming with portfolios. We're coming with documentation. We're trying to take this seriously and be seen in a serious way. One day, pipers will get the credit they deserve, and it'll be like how we can all think fondly of the bootlegging era—yeah, that's how we got NASCAR. They were the bad boys, but they're not that bad."

The workspace that Whobery and Hoppenfeld share is a communal glass-blowing studio affectionately called "Cobra Kai," after the antagonistic dojo in *Karate Kid*. It's an open warehouse space about 50 feet long, with eight lamp-equipped stations, each littered with scrap glass, graphite tools and canisters of Boromax frit powder. Every few feet, a completed product from someone's personal collection stands above the snippets, its glass lightly tinted with use.

Kilns and lathes of various sizes are organized according to workflow throughout the room, though the setup looks less like a pottery studio and more like a collective bachelor pad, as if everyone brought their own couch into the living room on move-in day.

Thor, a wiry boxer belonging to a glassblower renting a station near the back entrance, shuffles around the studio before plopping down on an open spot on the concrete floor.

Whobery, originally from Torrance, and Hoppenfeld, who cut his teeth in the Philly glass-art scene, are two of the



ON DISPLAY AT HIGH PRIORITY GLASS

SARAH BENNETT

biggest contemporary names in the functional-glass art business. And along with East Coast-bred stalwarts such as Derek "DWreck" White, Jonathon "Pakoh" Gilbert and Nate "JAG" Purcell, all have moved to Orange County in the past few years in an unexplained immigration of

land Book of Glass realized his African-inspired scenes of baskets and figures were actually usable pipes.

"I will tell you right now that 90 percent of the industry is pretty unimaginative. Most guys are just ordinary pipers," says White, who sandblasts pen-

like thinking that in some subtle way, with a pipe, you are influencing society's boundaries."

If Whobery is the calm, meticulous one of the local glassblower bunch, then White is the Bret Michaels of pipers. Bearded like Brent Hinds from Mastodon and with a friendliness that's as aggressive as it is passionate, White has been through the past 15 years of the culture's uncertainty and lived to reap the small-business benefits of it.

"I was really driven to work not for someone else," White says of why he first started creating pipes in the late '90s. "I enjoyed smoking weed, and it was all about the lifestyle."

Back then, there were already legions of guys creating smokeable basics out of borosilicate glass—a type of hard (not soda-lime) glass originally designed for laboratory equipment. Used to make beakers and test tubes, boro was easily adopted by pipers for its ability to both withstand higher temperatures and be blown to within millimeters of precision, allowing creative glassworkers to experiment with new designs and shapes.

But the art and culture of glass pipes was still young when White began, going back only a decade or so to the Eugene, Oregon-parked trailer of a hippie named Bob Snodgrass, revered as the godfather of artistic hard glass.

Blowing glass pipes for his friends and

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

Dubbed "Operation Pipe Dream," the government's raids sought to take down all major pipe suppliers in the country and make an example out of those who dared to sell pipes, bongs and roach clips via the Internet, a rarely enforced federal crime. Major companies were immediately dissolved. . . . It also scared the shit out of glass artists who had just begun to find a way to showcase their wares to a larger audience.

notable pipers.

Together, these newly local artists have been responsible for introducing into the scene now-commonplace borosilicate creations including marbles, pendants, inline percolators and sandblasted vapor rigs. Purcell was the first in the community to have his work be recognized by the studio glass-art world—although none of the curators who chose to include his pieces in the coffee-table-worthy *Pen-*

tagrams and naked ladies on handmade pieces in a Fountain Valley office park. "But some of us use the tools to express ourselves. That's why I embraced the taboo. If pipe-makers are going to be viewed as the scum of the earth, then that's going to be everything I'm about. Because the pipe is a social instrument, by putting religious and sexually provocative imagery, it incites conversations from the users on those topics. I

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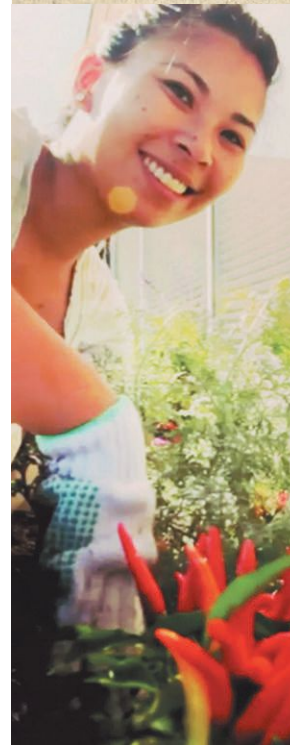
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High Art

» FROM PAGE 12

fellow potheads in the '80s, Snodgrass was the first to discover the technique of fuming, inadvertently creating the "color-changing" pipe, now a staple for any respectable head shop. With growing demand for these new smoking apparatuses, Snodgrass also became the first glassblower to take his products on the road, hawking "Snoddies" at Grateful Dead concerts and building the pipe scene's first guerrilla sales network.

When not touring with the Dead, Snodgrass was in Eugene, teaching apprentices the gospel of smokeable glasswork. Other glassblowers began building upon Snodgrass' discoveries, working with even more textures and color patterns, designing intricate, so-called "heady" smoking devices that looked less and less like the standard handpipe and inventing new ways of getting smoke to lungs, such as the bubbler and the multichambered bong.

Soon, communities of boro blowers were popping up all over the country, each with its own talent pool, personality and techniques. Names such as Darby Holm, Clinton Roman and Delene Peralta began to emerge, though reaching a wider market to sell to remained elusive.

"Before the Internet, I'd have to go to a Phish concert or a parking lot of a festival," says Aaron "Marble Slinger" Golbert, an East Coast glass-pipe artist and director of *Degenerate Art*, the 2012 seminal documentary on the community. "I would sit on streets with them or take gun cases full of pipes to bars. Head shops weren't investing the kind of money we wanted. It was a different world—more wild West. We had no idea how many others were doing this."

At the turn of the millennium, the Internet became the new parking lot,

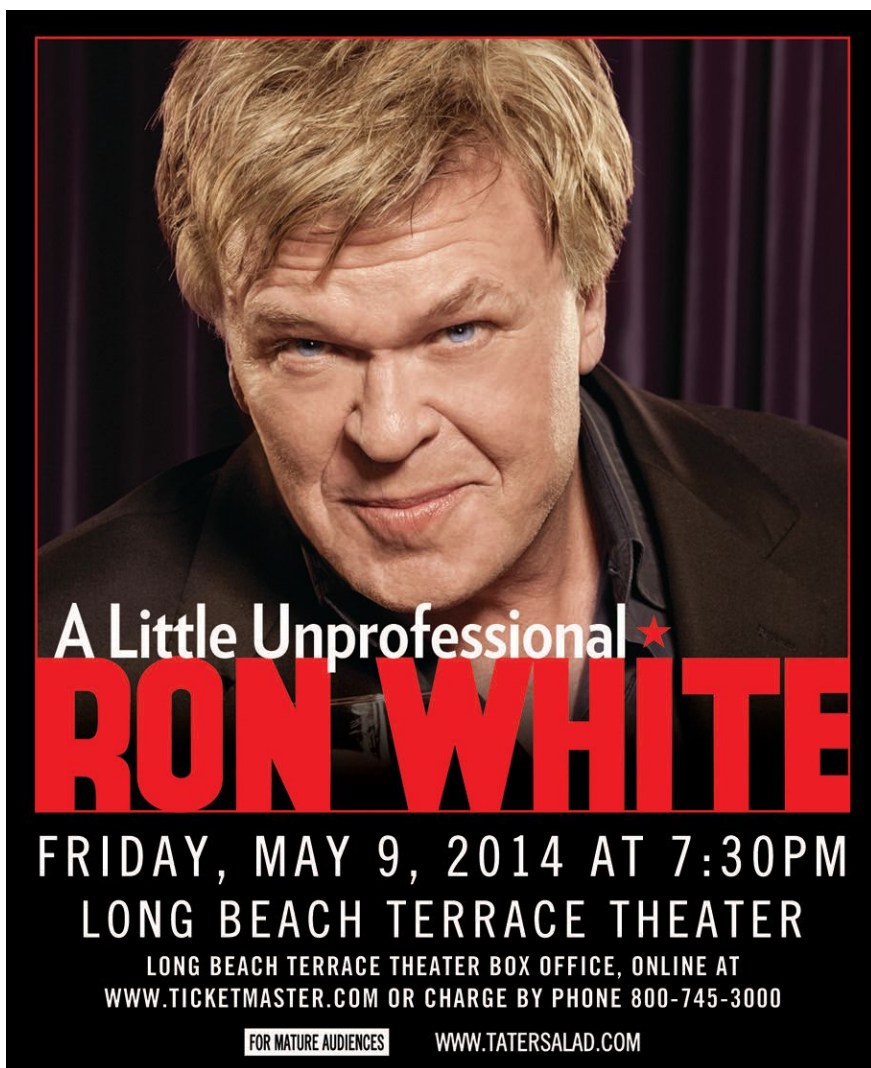
and pipers turned to its limitless shelf space and exponential outreach abilities to showcase and sell their increasingly artistic goods. The success of individual glassblowers, however, gave way to companies that turned out production-grade pipes for a market that seemed to have no boundaries, and by the early 2000s, the billion-dollar-a-year drug-paraphernalia industry had landed itself on the Drug Enforcement Agency's radar.

Early on the morning of Feb. 24, 2003, federal agents knocked on front doors around the country, dragging more than 55 glass-pipe manufacturers and website owners out of their beds and into jail. Dubbed "Operation Pipe Dream," the government's raids sought to take down all major pipe suppliers in the country and make an example out of those who dared to sell pipes, bongs and roach clips via the Internet, a rarely enforced federal crime. Major companies were immediately dissolved including Jerome Baker Glass, 101 North Glass and Chong Glass Works/Nice Dreams, the company started by Tommy Chong's son, which infamously landed the *Up In Smoke* star in jail for nine months.

It also scared the shit out of glass artists who had just begun to find a way to showcase their wares to a larger audience.

Although pushed back underground and away from the sales engine of the Internet, pipe-making didn't disappear as an art form as much as it became reborn as an even more community-oriented craft. Artists took on hip-hop-style nicknames as they experimented further. In an attempt to avoid meddling in online sales, many artists uploaded photos of their work to web galleries, including www.glasspipes.org, where fans and other glassblowers could network and give feedback to one another.

"That's where we became aware of the rest of us in the country. It was



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glasspipes.org that was really unifying,” says White, who picked up the moniker DWreck around this time. “This is pre-Myspace, pre-Facebook.”

Today, as public support leans more and more in favor of marijuana legalization and President Barack Obama said last year the federal government has “bigger fish to fry” than marijuana users, Operation Pipe Dream’s effects live on through the negative public perceptions of smokeable glass art. Even though there is a large and growing community of glass pipe collectors who now pay top-dollar for one-offs from major industry names, the culture continues to live just under the surface of mainstream acceptance, trapped by legal issues of functionality and archaic ideas of what a pipe can be.

“The only thing that most people know about glass pipes is that it’s drug paraphernalia. That’s the reputation on the street,” says Gilbert. “But when I only have three sentences to explain to a stranger what I do, I usually try to describe them as ornate and artistic pieces, and I’ll usually bring the price tag out. ‘My friend sold one last week for \$10,000.’ That’s almost the price of a car, so then their imagination starts to visualize something amazing.”

The first piece of art Dustin Abrams ever bought was a conch shell pipe by Christina Cody. When laid flat on a table, the spiny, glass creation looked like a piece of oceanic flotsam, not out of place among sand dollars and pieces of coral on a vacation-rental coffee table. But when the Los Alamitos native took the piece back to his friends at San Diego State University and showed them its underside, everyone flipped out that this apparent paperweight was as functional as it was beautiful.

“No one there had ever seen anything like that before,” Abrams says. “From that one, my collection has grown extensively. I can’t stop.”

Abrams is one of four brothers who own and operate High Priority Glass and GooseFire Gallery in Long Beach, a dual-purpose storefront. The concept is simple—have a high-end head shop attached to a functional glass-art gallery—and the

execution divine.

From the street, the gallery is all that is visible; red double doors lead curiosity-seekers into a brick-walled foyer, then into a white-walled space filled with cases upon cases of contemporary artistic pipemaking. Monthly shows ensure the cases consistently rotate works by large industry names, but the house collection features one-of-a-kind vintage and recent pieces, from Kurt B’s famous honey-bear bong to glass Munnys from Philly glassblower Coyle.

About 10 steps into GooseFire, High Priority Glass becomes visible. Glass counters and white-lit cabinets line the inner space’s back walls. Inside are pieces of meticulous contemporary glasswork of every style and genre, from nearly every artist and brand in the game.

From sherlocks to steamrollers to hundreds of direct-injection bubblers, High Priority stocks pricey glass pieces and accessories for even the most discerning smoker. If you ever thought pipes were only sold at seedy cigarette or porn dealers that just so happen to stock some crappy Chinese glass, this is most definitely not that place.

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High Art

» FROM PAGE 15

“People who come in off the street thinking we’re just a gallery have a hard time with it. They walk through GooseFire and see we’re a pipe shop, and they do a double-take, which is expected,” Abrams says. “If you’ve never seen it before, you’re going to be scared for sure. If you’re not involved in this, you might even be hesitant to walk into a place like this. But then you see the type of work that’s in just the first few cases, and you quickly see the possibilities.”

Abrams’ older brother, Matt, started High Priority Glass at 2765 Broadway in 2010 with the idea of stocking all American-made products from brands such as Illadelph and Zob. After discovering the work of famous glass artists, however, the store began carrying more art-driven, headier pieces, and soon enough, a gallery was an inevitable addition. “It was kind of forced,” Dustin says. “The need overweighed everything else.”

GooseFire Gallery opened across the street from High Priority just six months later, and Dustin began coordinating monthly art shows featuring names such as Clinton Roman, Jason Lee and Coyle, who were tasked with filling up an entire gallery and displaying who they are, as any major artist would at a mainstream gallery. For some artists, it was their first solo gallery exhibition, earning GooseFire national recognition. And for collectors, these shows are a rare opportunity to see and purchase the glasswork in person—even if it means traveling across state lines to get there. Shows easily draw 500 to 1,000 people per opening.

Aside from Brooklyn’s Easy Street Gallery, which closed to move operations online in 2011, GooseFire is the only physical gallery in the country that has dedicated itself to showcasing and elevating glass-pipe art. Its location in Long Beach, with its proxim-

ity to Orange County’s glassblowing community, is pure serendipity, but its importance to the greater glass-art culture is immense.

“The thing with glass pipes is we put a lot of work into it, and the reason we call our work ‘art’ is not to get into some discussion about what art is or ‘art vs. craft’—we’re just looking for respect,” says Golbert. “So to have a gallery treat your work like it was any other gallery show, it’s definitely inspiring to the artist. When you give an artist an opportunity like a show, it really plays a big role in the psyche of things. . . . I would definitely say that a place like GooseFire anchors a region. They’re the only ones doing what they’re doing.”

While stores such as Illusionz in Colorado and Big Mike’s in Texas stock similar artists and are notable high-end head shops in their own right, High Priority and GooseFire have proven themselves to be a formidable double force, especially on the educational front. In a city where the constructed Arts Districts and mildly attended monthly art walks are on the other side of town, bustling GooseFire shows tend to intrigue locals. And ever since High Priority ditched its original retail unit across the street to be attached physically to GooseFire, the Abramses have been utilizing this unusual setup to spread the word about the growing art form.

“We thought it’d be more intriguing to say it’s functional,” says Dustin. “Then people have to ask, ‘What’s it used for?’ Well . . . what would you like to use it for?”

The line stretched down Broadway, through the Long Beach darkness for a full city block, ending in front of a car full of young guys drinking cans of Coke with all the doors open. The car’s license plate was from Washington.

“Oh, my god, that’s DWreck!” one of the guys squealed to his buddies as White walked toward Temple Avenue.

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DISPLAY CASE AT HIGH PRIORITY GLASS



He stopped to say hi to another bearded man. "And there's Joe Peters!" Everyone scrambled for a look.

More than 1,500 people from around the world assembled at GooseFire Gallery that September night for Peters' first solo gallery show, which featured 10 pedestaled cases filled with multi-eyed aliens, ornate oceanic scenes and dozens of creations done in the artist's latest honey-inflected style.

The most breathtaking pieces barely looked functional, mantle-worthy sculptures covered with mini glass bees and delicate honeycombs, oozing with amber boro resembling sap from a tree. By the end of the night, most of the show—including multiple \$1,800 pendants, \$250 dabbers and \$3,000 concentrate vapor rigs—was sold out.

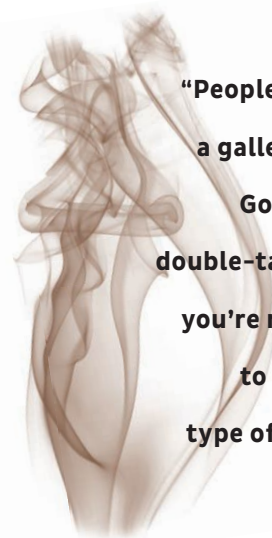
Peters' "Side Show" is already, by far, the most attended exhibition GooseFire has seen in the two and a half years it has been open, and it may well have been the best-attended opening at a private gallery in Long Beach history.

The turnout was more than just a testament to the current popularity of artistic glass pipes in general—it was also an indication of the scene's next level, what happens when a subculture encourages the more traditional artists not just to pay attention, but also to join in.

Peters isn't a pipe-maker by trade—he's a mainstream glass artist, hurt by the sagging economy, who for the past few years has been using his skills to make a living in the high-end pipe world. As with former Glass Art Society presi-

dent Robert Mickelsen, who now makes pricey pipes under the name RAM, Peters is a slice of studio art in a sea of self-taught glassblowers.

"Joe Peters is a milestone," says White. "When I got into this, even then, I was like, 'Where are the real glassblowers, and why aren't they doing this?' Of course, it



was because it's so taboo, but Joe Peters all these years later is doing what I thought the original glassblowers could be doing the whole time. He brought the traditional glassblowing aesthetic and made it functional."

The pieces Peters made for his GooseFire show were so extremely technical and so far into another echelon from

glass pipes being made today that White compared it to when rock & roll was guys playing Rickenbackers in suits and ties, then—BAM!—Led Zeppelin.

This kind of integration of some members of the mainstream glass-art community has convinced many pipers their work will soon be getting larger recogni-

"People who come in off the street thinking we're just a gallery have a hard time with it. They walk through Goosefire and see we're a pipe shop, and they do a double-take, which is expected," Dustin Abrams says. "If you're not involved in this, you might even be hesitant to walk into a place like this. But then you see the type of work that's in just the first few cases, and you quickly see the possibilities."

tion from the art world—specifically, the country's two major glass museums. "I see the pipes as part of a culture, rather than as art, per se. . . . Most pipe-makers do not have an art background; they are trained in glassmaking—and specifically in flameworking—but not studio art," says Tina Oldknow, curator of modern glass at the Corning Museum of Glass in

New York. "However, I think the pipes relate to a larger culture of 'fantasy,' and in this milieu, I think the pipe-makers would thrive."

Though Oldknow says pipes are something her museum should collect and she is open to discussing potential donations, two curators from the Museum of Glass in Tacoma are the only ones with major institutional ties who have actually made the jump to putting together an exhibit. Last month, the Center on Contemporary Art in Seattle opened "Ceci N'Est Pas Une Pipe," the first large-scale show curated by people outside of the glass-pipe culture. The group show focused on "flameworked borosilicate glass associated with the emergence of cannabis legalization," including pipes, bubblers, tubes, vaporizers, jars, marbles, scientific glass, and other functional and non-functional fine art inspired by the movement.

Still, many ask, if you want acceptance from the mainstream art world, why make it a pipe? Without a bowl in it, many of the sculptural pieces from Whobery, Hoppenfeld, Gilbert, White and more would easily stand up against other contemporary glass.

"I think it's a thing that brings all of us together—the pipe," says Hoppenfeld. "The pipe connects it to the subculture that it came from. It's the linking force for everything that we're about. We're bringing it just as hard as whatever you would consider art. We might have to hide the bowl and cover it up for now, but we're getting it in there—you'll see."

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[THEATER]

Watch Your Head

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

The Halloween season came to a close, but that doesn't mean you can't still get spooked. Washington Irving's classic tale *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is equal parts ghost story and folk legend—and one of the oldest in America's rich history. Numerous television and film productions have taken liberties with the story, but the headless horseman character remains the same. Adapted for the stage, this version follows the original story of ill-fated Ichabod Crane and delivers all the eerie chills and gloomy atmosphere of the town of Sleepy Hollow. Sometimes, nothing beats a good ghost story.

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow at Laguna Playhouse, 606 Laguna Canyon Rd., Laguna Beach, (949) 497-2787; www.lagunaplayhouse.com. 7 p.m. Through Nov. 15. \$20. —AIMEE MURILLO

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[DANCE]

The Right Moves

DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM
For nearly 45 years, the Dance Theatre of Harlem has brought the inspiration (and, in some cases, the much-needed outlet) of ballet to children in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. Founded after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the company offers kids ages 3 to 18 preprofessional ballet classes mixed with artistic, theatrical direction. This week, the troupe returns to California for the first time in a decade with three mesmerizing performances: *Gloria*, choreographed by Robert Garland, with music by Francis Poulenc; *past-carry-forward*, choreographed by Tanya Wideman-Davis and Thaddeus Davis, with music by Willie "Lion" Smith; and *Contested Space*, choreographed by Donald Byrd, with music by Amon Tobin. The show is one-night-only—don't miss this chance to be truly amazed.

Dance Theatre of Harlem at the Cerritos Center, 12700 Center Court Dr., Cerritos, (562) 916-8501; www.cerritoscenter.com. 8 p.m. \$50-\$75. —ERIN DEWITT

[EVENT]

Come As You Are

Ch'rch In tha Wyld

Touted as "the moment you realized who you were, who you are, who you were born to be," tonight's art party is all about breaking down the limitations of what people think good art is supposed to be. Presented by Poetic Reform Party and Critical BeatDown, this is an evening of poetry, spoken word, live music and a mass of creative energy. Spoken word comes courtesy of Jragonfly Jon, while poetry will flow from the mouths of Marcus Omari and Treesje Powers, and Student Body Presidents front man Evan Palmer shares his musical stylings. The whole shebang is hosted by international DJ Roiall and hip-hop artist Basicali. With so many innovative forces together in one space, you won't be able to help but feel inspired yourself.

Ch'rch In tha Wyld at the Orange County Center for Contemporary Art, 117 N. Sycamore St., Santa Ana; www.occca.org. 8 p.m. Free. —ERIN DEWITT



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[CONCERT]

Going Cosmic

Zoé

Mexican band Zoé's just-out album, *Programaton*, is less a return to form than a refinement. In the five years since their last full-power full-length, they've explored remixes, acoustic versions and some impressive collaborations, scoring a slot at Coachella and even winning a Latin Grammy. But after all that came *Programaton*, the true successor to 2008's well-respected *Reptilectric*. Reinforced again by producer Phil Vinall, the new album offers an especially considered and concentrated version of the gently cosmic alt-pop that Zoé have become famous for, mixing in influences from MGMT to Medicine (on "Sedantes") and adding subtle and unexpected resonance to songs that are already ready to conquer the radio. It's been a long time, but Zoé show just how much they were really working.

Zoé at the Fox Theater Pomona, 301 S. Garey Ave., Pomona, (888) 283-6976; www.foxpomona.com. 8 p.m. \$35-\$49.50. All ages. —CHRIS ZIEGLER

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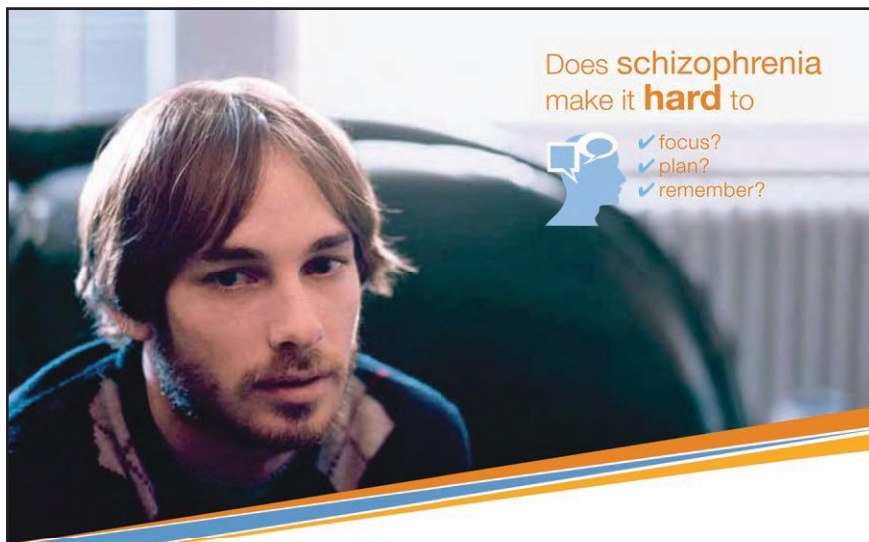
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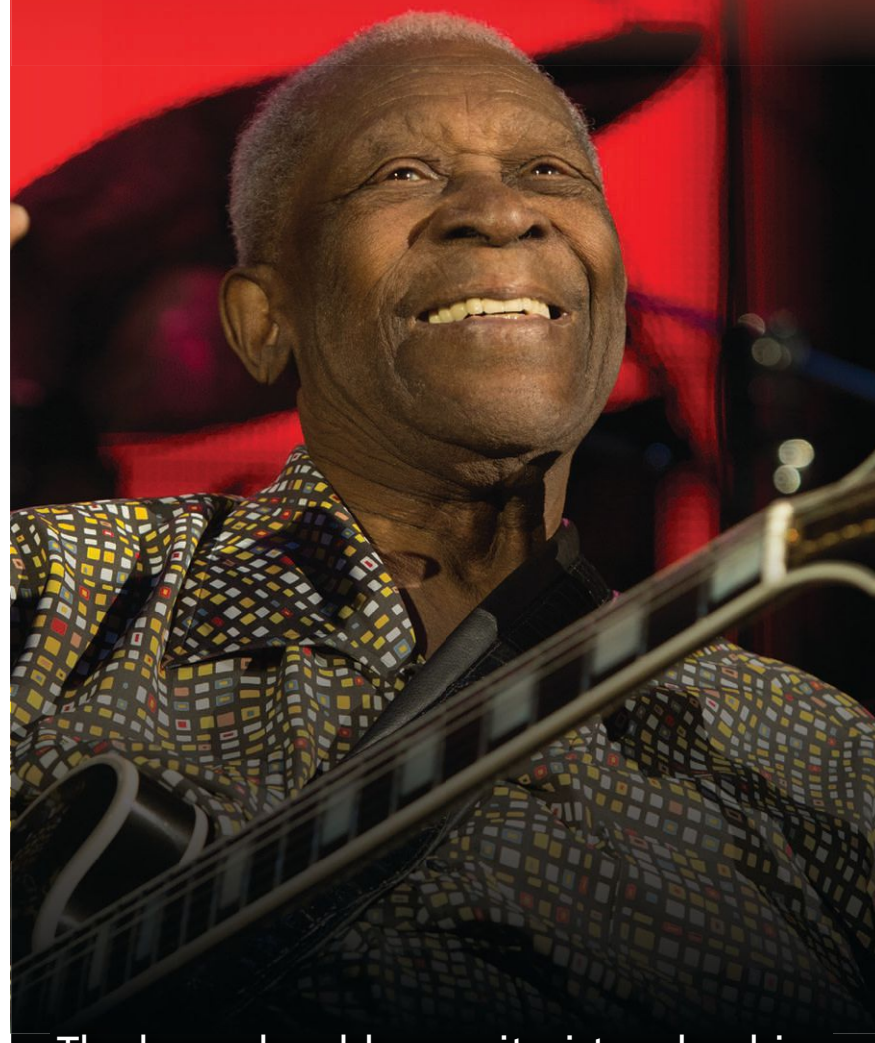
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sun/11/10

[THEATER]

Art Attack

The Intergalactic Nemesis

Sci-fi comics get the live-theater treatment with *The Intergalactic Nemesis* series, now at the Samueli Theater. Combining old-fashioned radio drama (three actors and a Foley artist voice all parts and sound effects into retro microphones) with thousands of graphic novel- and comic book-inspired images, *The Intergalactic Nemesis* is a stage production unlike any other. In *Book Two: Robot Planet Rising*, the sequel to last year's hit, *Book One*, we discover the "mystery of Elbee-Dee-Oh's disappearance in deep space," as well as delight in the visuals of lots and lots of robots—possibly to be used for evil purposes. If you've ever geekily dreamed of graphic novels coming to life, this is as close as it gets.

The Intergalactic Nemesis—Book Two: Robot Planet Rising at Segerstrom Center for the Arts, 600 Town Center Dr., Costa Mesa, (714) 556-ARTS; www.scfta.org. Noon & 4 p.m.; also Fri.-Sat. \$20-\$39.

—ERIN DEWITT



mon/11/11

[CONCERT]

Cultural Classical

Irish Chamber Orchestra

West gnocchi potatoes meet East boiled potatoes when Brooklyn-born, Italian-lady maestro JoAnn Falletta and the Irish Chamber Orchestra welcome world-renowned Northern Ireland flautist Sir James Galway. Falletta, whom *The New York Times* calls "one of the finest conductors of her generation," and Galway, who, as one of the first flute players to establish an international soloist career, was dubbed "The Man With the Golden Flute," will navigate via Limerick's Chamber Orchestra the waters of Harty's "In Ireland," Mozart's "Flute Concerto in D major" and "Symphony No. 41 in C major 'Jupiter,'" plus Hammond's "Carolan Variations." It's a sophisticated, cross-cultural evening, to be sure, so get your immigrant pride on and join them.

Irish Chamber Orchestra with Sir James Galway at Segerstrom Center for the Arts, 600 Town Center Dr., Costa Mesa, (714) 556-ARTS; www.scfta.org. 8 p.m. \$35-\$250. —SR DAVIES

IT'S BEEN
14 YEARS
ALREADY?!



[CONCERT]

Looking Back

MACY GRAY

Ah, 1999. It was the year Y2K scared thousands into stockpiling toilet paper and ammunition, the year George Lucas lost all our respect by introducing Jar Jar Binks to the world, and the year Ford Motors acquired Volvo. Yep, it was a pretty shitty year. Except, wait—what is that captivating sound? It's like the warm hum of an old record player. . . . Why, it's the lovely Macy Gray, the raspy-voiced vixen who sang her way into our hearts with the album *On How Life Is*. To celebrate the 14th anniversary of this fantastic event (one of the better events of the year), Gray performs at the Coach House. Featuring songs from her aforementioned multi-platinum debut album, as well as some covers from her new album, *Covered*, Gray will remind us of a simpler time, before the recession, when we thought *Shakespeare In Love* was the dopest.

Macy Gray at the Coach House, 33157 Camino Capistrano, San Juan Capistrano, (949) 496-8930; www.thecoachhouse.com. 7 p.m. \$32.50. —AMANDA PARSONS

tue/11/12

[CONCERT]

Devil's Music

The Murder City Devils

Our favorite ball-busting, electric organ-drenched, sinister-vocaled, garage-rock band of all time plays an exciting two-night run at the Observatory this week. A Murder City Devils show is something to grab onto tight when it swings by—the band play few shows per year (fortunately for us, usually on the West Coast), with new material released only once in the past decade. But Murder City fans are a die-hard sort—we'll wait as long as it takes for a chance to witness the throaty howl of singer Spencer Moody onstage. They play both Monday and Tuesday night—giving us a healthy double dose of mayhem before they disappear again into the fog of their hometown, Seattle.

The Murder City Devils at the Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana, (714) 957-0600; www.observatoryoc.com. 8 p.m.; also Mon. \$25. —ERIN DEWITT

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[THEATER]

On a Journey 4000 Miles

Amy Herzog's family-centric dramatic comedy may have eluded Broadway by a few streets, but that didn't stop the two-character narrative from winning the 2012 Obie for Best New American Play, *Time Magazine's* nod as the best play of that year, and even a spot as a finalist for the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. After 21-year-old Leo (played by Matt Caplan) suffers a terrible tragedy while biking cross-country, he

turns up at his grandmother's West Village apartment, lost and penniless (Grandmother Vera is spotlessly played by Jenny O'Hara). Over the course of a month, these two fiery characters, separated by 70 years, fight, disagree, come back together and ultimately create an invaluable bond. See *4000 Miles*, running at South Coast Rep, for an exquisitely told story that Caplan calls "both subtle and unforgettable. And, most important, human."

4000 Miles at South Coast Repertory, 655 Town Center Dr., Costa Mesa, (714) 708-5555; www.scr.org. 7:30 p.m. Through Nov. 17. \$20-\$53. —ERIN DEWITT



Heroes and Villains BEATS ANTIQUE

Bay Area world-tronica band Beats Antique are going old school on their new album—actually, they're kind of going primordial, with a two-part treatment of the ancient Campbellian hero's journey called *A Thousand Faces*. (If you've seen *Star Wars*, you know how the hero's journey goes.) Although Act 1 ends on something of a musical cliffhanger, with the punny title "Veil of Tears" and a particularly tense Middle Eastern melody over a relentless electronic beat, the rest of the album zigzags from style to style and mood to mood as our character presses ever on. Plus, Les Claypool adds his own unique atmosphere to the song that brings the villain into the light. Act 2 isn't out as an album yet, but Beats Antique plan to perform plenty of illuminating new material live. So enjoy the rare live music show that deserves a spoiler alert.

Beats Antique with Ill Esha and Sorne at the Yost Theater, 307 N. Spurgeon St., Santa Ana, (888) 862-9573; www.yosttheater.com. 8 p.m. \$20-\$40. All ages. —CHRIS ZIEGLER

thu/11/14

[THEATER]

Flip Your Hedwig Potted Potter

Zany British thespians Dan Clarkson and Jeff Turner go for the absolute lowest common denominator in their telling of everybody's favorite epic about the wizard kid with the lightning bolt on his forehead. Slapstick, puns, inside fan jokes, sound effects, goofy props and silly costumes bring the *Harry Potter* saga to the extremely small stage in *Potted Potter*, a peripatetic two-man goof on the most famous young-adult series of all time. It's both homage and jolly send-up of all seven books, done in just less than 70 minutes. It helps if you know the story of the boy who lived under the stairs and the translation of the Latin Hogwarts motto, but taking a young person and watching them laugh might be joy enough. (Never tickle a sleeping dragon!)

Potted Potter at the Irvine Barclay Theatre, 4242 Campus Dr., Irvine, (949) 854-4607; www.thebarclay.org. 7:30 p.m. Through Nov. 16. \$35-\$45. —ANDREW TONKOVICH

[COMEDY]

Online and Onstage TMI—Searching for Happiness on Google

Seen doing sets on shows such as *The Tonight Show*, *Evening At the Improv* and MTV's *Half Hour Comedy*, as well as gracing more than a dozen Budweiser commercials, Don McMillan's humor has no limits. He headlines clubs across the country with his standup, but this week, he brings his show *TMI—Searching for Happiness on Google* to the Irvine Improv. Explaining the way technology has taken over his life and how his endless searching on the web led him to what was most important, McMillan's story will both intrigue you and leave you with side-splitting laughs. And while McMillan was once labeled "technically funny," we're sure that when you see him at the Improv, you'll classify him as *totally* funny.

TMI—Searching for Happiness on Google at the Irvine Improv, 71 Fortune Dr., Irvine, (949) 854-5455; www.improv.com. 8 p.m. \$15. 18+. —ALI LERMAN

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What's a Wasachio?

White Wasabi does crudo and other things that make it distinctive, even if it looks like every other sushi bar

BY EDWIN GOEI

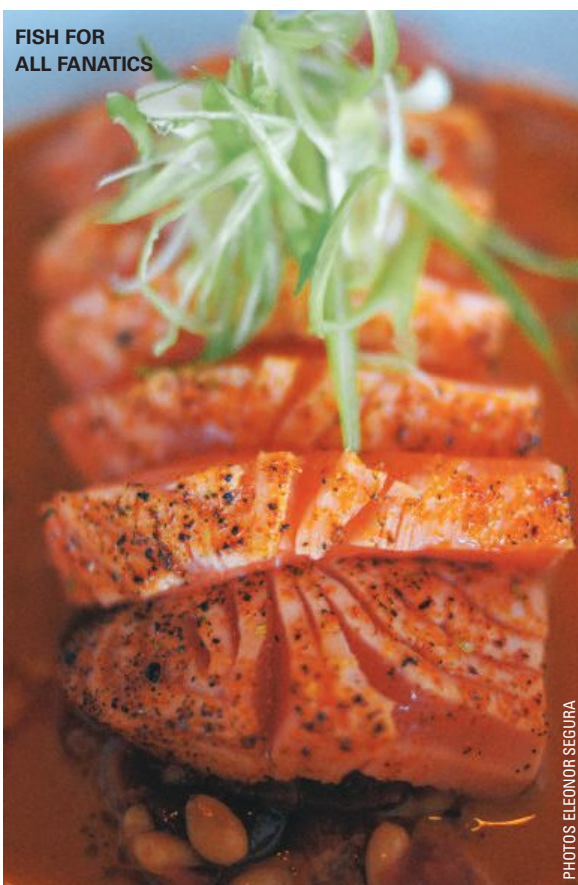
If you've been to your share of sushi bars, White Wasabi Sushi + Beer will resemble most of them. Take the floor plan of a random neighborhood joint, then overlay it on top of White Wasabi's, and chances are good they'd line up perfectly. There's only so much a sushi-restaurant designer can do with a room when he's given the usual rectangle of space in a supermarket-anchored shopping center to work with. White Wasabi, as with so many others, is located in one. So when you walk in, you aren't surprised to see the bar butted up against the wall to the left, the tables to the right and the restrooms in the back. Apart from the exposed air ducts that zigzag the ceiling, you notice nothing distinctive here, except maybe the blackboard that wraps itself above the bar like a headband. To give a sense of immediacy, the entire menu has been scribbled in chalk. It's only when you flip through the printed menu that you realize White Wasabi isn't like the last place from which you ordered a California roll bento box.

The first thing that pops out is the sushi roll called the "Prosciutto," which promises salami, goat cheese and a length of shrimp tempura, the whole thing wrapped around prosciutto, and then deep fried. Then you find out that the list of "special sashimi" is not, in fact, sashimi, but crudo, the Italian way to eat raw fish that involves marinades, elaborate garnishes and sauce—really, really good sauce. When you order the first item listed in this category, you're served eight caviar-topped salmon slices swimming in a sea of a frothy, thick, peanut butter-colored concoction chef Rain Pantana calls "Wasachio Sauce." You take your fish, carefully fold it over the caviar as though a taco and drag it through

the creamy liquid, and when you've exhausted all of your salmon, you ask for a spoon to scoop up the rest. You take a wild guess from the name that the rich, tangy, almost nutty emulsion must have been made with wasabi and pistachio... or something like that.

The sauce in the next "special sashimi" you try beguiles and delights you just as much as the wasachio did. This one is adobe red, and you're sure it involves Roma tomatoes because it's mentioned on the menu and has the mild acidity of something tomato-based. But it, too, is a mystery. This time, the grouping of seared salmon slices sits on an island of

FISH FOR ALL FANATICS



PHOTOS ELEONOR SEGURA

tiny white beans that's showered with fresh berries, the sauce lapping up the sides as though waves on a deserted beach. As you squeegee up the last drops with your finger, realizing the kitchen poured in enough to coat a serving of pasta, you're now completely convinced White Wasabi is definitely unlike any sushi bar you've seen before. It defies categorization, but you try anyway. There are the hard-core itamaes who only do nigiri; and there are the likes of RA Sushi, emporiums whose main goal is to pack them in during happy hour. White Wasabi seems to float above them all in its own cloud of creativity, even if it still



offers nigiri, its own happy hour and combo specials (featuring teriyaki chicken, beef or salmon coupled with tempura or California rolls).

Another thing you've seen everywhere else but never in a sushi bar: roasted Brussels sprouts, cooked in an oven located behind the bar, and coaxed to deliciousness with garlic butter and olive oil in a sauté pan. For another appetizer called a "Phyllo Quartet," tiny phyllo cups are filled with various goodies such as crab topped with a lacy, fried quail egg and pokes of tuna, salmon and hamachi—a plate so elegant-looking it's destined for thousands of braggy Facebook posts. And when you order the fried calamari, you find White Wasabi does it as though it means it, serving the squid in a miniature brown bag, the steaks as thick as French toast sticks and so obscenely tender they should be set as an example to follow for all who would fry squid.

When you venture into the more traditional sushi rolls, you see more garnishes and more mystery sauces. You discover that fried shards of crispy parsnip and a creamy jalapeño sauce does, indeed, work very well with a seared-salmon-topped roll stuffed with spicy salmon, asparagus, shrimp tempura and cream cheese. It's so good you ignore the moment that nothing in it seems to have anything to do with Scotland Yard, which is what the roll is called. White Wasabi uses other whimsical names that don't connect in any way with the rolls they're describing. But then you expect that: You've been to your share of sushi bars.

WHITE WASABI SUSHI + BEER

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This is how progress works in Orange County: find a strip mall that houses two legendary Mexican restaurants, places that have fed generations of eaters, that remain wildly popular—and unceremoniously boot them to the proverbial dustbins.

That's what happened late last month, when Santa Ana officials forced out Grande Bakery and El Pollo Norteño from their longtime homes on Grand Avenue in the name of modernity. Grande just happened to be the second-oldest remaining Mexican restaurant in OC, having fed the masses its pan dulces, tortillas and tamales since 1951 (only Sarinana's Tamale Factory, about 10 minutes away, is older). El Pollo Norteño is a bit younger—it opened in 1981—but is no less historic: for many *gabachos*, it was their first experience of pollo asado, the Sinaloa art of placing chicken over a mesquite-fueled open flame and eating the sumptuous results, a style since copied by the Juan Pollo and Char-o Chicken chains. But such heritage wasn't enough for SanTana officials, who decided the strip mall that housed the two stood in the way of a street-widening project and used eminent domain to push them out (why couldn't they have done that to *The Orange County Register*?).

The owners of Grande Bakery also owned the strip mall and are taking the city to court to get a higher payout than what SanTana officials offered. Councilman Vince Sarmiento has gone on the record as saying he wants Grande Bakery to reopen with the city's help, but that's probably not going to happen. At least El Pollo Norteño will remain: its success over the years allowed it to open three other branches, one in SanTana, one in Anaheim and the other in Garden Grove. There, you can still order epic meals of chicken, the skin turned into golden shards, the meat as bouncy as a marshmallow, the two soaked in lime juice and chile powder that embeds itself down into the bone. *Sí*, they sell burritos and tacos and even other meats, but one always goes with your choice of chicken size (quarter, half or full), sides of pinto beans and rice, and corn tortillas that should be better but you always forgive because everything else is so delicious.

Those other Pollo Norteño outposts will last decades, thank God. But the closing of the pioneer location is a reminder to us all: Restaurants that we take for granted can quickly disappear due to the whims of *pendejo* bureaucrats. Eat while you can.

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HOT AT COSTA MESA'S
HOOD KITCHEN



ELEONOR-SEGURA

The Paleo Prophet

Kyle Owens of Allspice Eats

It's one thing to have a passion for something, and it's another to pursue it. Kyle Owens took a risk when he chose to start his own service, cooking and delivering Paleo-friendly meals to clients in CrossFit gyms. Creating flavorful meals that are healthy isn't an easy task. Yet Owens takes on the challenge with gusto, utilizing fresh vegetables and meats.

OC WEEKLY: Most undervalued ingredient:

KYLE OWENS: Avocados are extremely versatile. Beyond guacamole, they can be used to create dressings, sauces, even a healthier chocolate mousse.

What cultures do your meals encompass?

I use Southern, Latin and Italian, to name a few. I create meals that have made a real impact on me, whether while I was growing up or in recent years.

What is featured on the menu this season?

Pumpkin. Right now, they're all around us. I'll be doing a Paleo pumpkin muffin with honey butter and a pumpkin soup with fresh herbs and pine nuts or pepitas. *Can you define Paleo cuisine?*

I adhere to the principles of Paleo cuisine. I use high-quality meats; poultry; and fresh vegetables, fruits and nuts. I avoid grains, legumes, dairy, and refined flours and sugars.

Where was your most recent meal?

My mother-in-law's Ecuadorian ceviche with white popcorn—so good!

Best culinary tip for the home cook:

Taste each component of your meal in your mind first, and then create it in the kitchen; know ahead of time the flavors you are striving to achieve.

What did your catering experience teach you?

Proper planning promotes good execution. Culinarily speaking, Orange County has the best:

ON THE LINE

» ANNE MARIE PANORINGAN

Garlic noodles from AnQi.

What is your beverage of choice?

C₂O coconut water from Sprouts.

One food you can't live without:

Crab. It has such a great natural taste. A little bit of lemon is all I need.

Favorite chef:

Emeril Lagasse. The types of food he creates and the manner in which he does it reminds me of the food I grew up with.

Favorite meal growing up:

Seafood gumbo. A family friend from Texas used to make this. When I started dabbling in cooking, he taught me how to make it. I put my own personal touches on it. For example, I don't use lard or butter when making my roux; I just brown my flour.

Your best recent food find:

Pork shank from a little Italian restaurant in Cabo called Salvatore's. It was seasoned to perfection, and the meat fell off of the bone. It was heaven.

What is your production and delivery schedule?

I prepare and cook meals on Monday and Wednesday, and then deliver them on Tuesday and Thursday.

Favorite places to eat:

Pier 72 in Long Beach, Joe's Restaurant in Venice and Eva's Caribbean Kitchen in Laguna Beach.

Your earliest food memory:

Eating Maryland crabs spread out on newspaper in the back yard of close family friends at about age 3 in New York.

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IT'S A FISH
TYPE OF ISSUE!



Fish for Breakfast?

Daing na bangus (marinated milkfish)
silog breakfast at Chowking

Unlike us Americans, Filipinos have no qualms about having a big old stinky fish—with the head still attached—as breakfast, paired with fried rice and a fried egg. The fish is usually bangus, or milkfish, a species beloved by Pinoys and Indonesians alike for its inherent yogurt-like tang. This is not a mild fish. It's, well, fishy. It tastes like fish should, is less oily than mackerel, but richer in flavor than salmon, and has a thousand comb-like bones if you eat it straight out of the water unprocessed.

When you have bangus at a Filipino restaurant, it won't have any bones. Called daing na bangus, it will be bifurcated lengthwise, marinated in vinegar and garlic, and deep-fried to a golden brown so the

EAT THIS NOW

» EDWIN GOEI

flesh can be easily scooped up with a spoon. And at Chowking, part of the Jollibee conglomerate, a silog (egg and fried rice) breakfast-plate combo containing it and another meat—say, pork tocino—can be had at any time of the day... which automatically makes it more palatable for those who shudder at eating fish for breakfast but have no qualms with eating eggs for dinner.

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DRINK OF THE WEEK

» CHARLES LAM

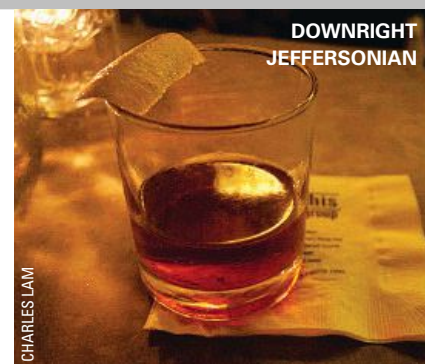
Better Sazerac at Memphis At the Santora

I have always had an affinity for the French. It runs in my family: There's French blood on my mom's side (or so my grandmother told us), I spoke with my grandfather better in French than Vietnamese, and my dad sang me French songs when I was a child, so it shouldn't be a surprise that when 14-year-old Charles Lam had to choose between French and Spanish, he chose the less useful one. (At least it's more romantic... right?)

The Francophilia has leached into my drinking. Belgian ales (they count), cognac (the drink of my people), absinthe (who doesn't love anise seed?)—I love them all. So when I heard that the sazerac Jefferson Van Billard concocted at Memphis At the Santora was "the Frenchiest thing" he's ever made, well... here's this review. It's true. That sazerac is the most French thing I've ever consumed, and I spent a good chunk of my last year as a French major sitting at the Anthill Pub, drinking wine, eating cheese and reading Molière.

THE DRINK

Van Billard's sazerac is a mix of cognac, both



DOWNRIGHT
JEFFERSONIAN

Peychaud's and Angostura bitters, a Charreusse blend, and turbinado sugar served straight up in a glass spritzed with absinthe and a sliver of lemon rind. For a drink that's all alcohol, the sazerac is exceedingly mellow and does a great job of being an autumn cocktail without being an "autumn" cocktail. There's no cinnamon, no apple, no freaking pumpkin spice, but it tastes nice and herbal. It leaves you cozy and warm and is almost medicinal in a you're-going-to-sleep-well kind of way. This is the sazerac you want when you feel like journaling or being morose or conquering the rest of mainland Europe as an emperor.

MEMPHIS AT THE SANTORA

201 N. Broadway, Santa Ana, (714) 564-1064; www.memphiscafe.com/santora.

The God Who Slummed on Earth

Thor returns, diminished
BY AMY NICHOLSON

Among the Avengers, Thor should reign supreme. Sure, Captain America is the de facto leader, but even he—as with the others—is just a jacked-up human. Thor is a god. Or if not quite a god, as he demurs, he's the next best thing: a flying titan with a 5,000-year lifespan. How old is he now? Who knows. But if you've seen the trailer, you know I'm not the only one tempted to hack off a limb and count the rings.

Do the math, and in Thor-years, a mortal lives as long as a carnival goldfish. Which explains why he's befuddled when Earth girl Jane (Natalie Portman) slaps him for ditching her in New Mexico. To her, the blond lug (Chris Hemsworth) has been MIA for two years. To him, it's just been a momentary pop-off while he, you know, fought the rest of space into submission. And to us, it's just a quick, cheap giggle. Though Portman and Hemsworth are two perfect physical specimens, they give off less heat than a dime-store lighter. Portman seems to be inwardly rolling her eyes that she has followed up her Oscar win with two roles that have stuck her in a metal bra.

No matter. Their miscast romance is just one cog in *Thor: The Dark World*, which is itself just one motor in the billion-dollar Marvel machine that will run tirelessly as long as each film is, at minimum, competent. *The Dark World* has the essentials—four fights, six quips and one Earth city reduced to rubble—and it moves the franchise another furlong closer to 2015's *Avengers 2*.

Instead of Kenneth Branagh's delightfully silly Shakespeare, this Thor is helmed by TV director Alan Taylor of *Game of Thrones*. Thanks to *The Avengers*' \$1.5 billion global haul, Taylor was clearly given a bigger checkbook. Thor's astral home of Asgard is twinklier, the Rainbow Bridge is rainbower, and the villains, well, are still just a bunch of grim-faced gray-and-black aliens—haven't we killed six kinds of them already?—equipped with the Aether, yet another raw element of destruction akin to the Tesseract. You'd think the universe would stop creating suicide weapons, but then again, this galaxy is so goofy it's made of nine colorful circular worlds that every five millennia layer themselves like a Super Bowl dip.

As *The Dark World*—so named for Svartalfheim, the home of the Dark Elves—starts, the nine realms are due to align again that week. Whadda coincidence! And so awakens the dread elf king Malekith (Christopher Eccleston), a fiend with white skin and coal-lump eyes like a skinny snowman, who wants to reclaim the Aether and simultaneously smash every living thing to pieces, which is a surprise only if you haven't seen a comic-

book movie in the past six years. (Did it really take eight credited writers to come up with that shocker of a climax?) At least there are some nifty black-hole grenades, which turn their victims inside-out like a rolled-up sock before going *poof*.

Hemsworth's Thor is still big and blond, and he makes a grand entrance. Here, he's first seen thwomping his hammer against a rock monster while Wagnerian Valkyries shriek their excitement. He gets one half-decent nude scene for the ladies, though nothing so lusty as in the first film, when he silenced Portman just by passing shirtless through her apartment. But the sequel forces him to spend most of his time in space, against golden CG vistas that leave him seeming puny. He fares better on Earth, where Hemsworth can get laughs by being a Norse god in mundane apartments, dutifully hanging his hammer on a coat rack. Torn between two worlds, the character feels adrift in his own movie when he's the one Avenger who should be the most anchored—he's certainly the only one with a full regiment of family and friends, even if his younger brother Loki (Tom Hiddleston) can't stop trying to kill everyone.

It's impossible to imagine Tony Stark hanging out at a bar with his friends' babies, as Thor does here. And unlike the Iron Man flicks—which, for better and worse, hum along solely on star Robert Downey Jr.'s charisma—Thor's world is so crowded by naked scientists (Stellan Skarsgård), wisecracking babes (Kat Dennings), hard-fighting babes (Jaimie Alexander), imperious kings (Anthony Hopkins) and idiot interns (Jonathan Howard) that Thor himself can feel almost inessential. He even lets *Bridesmaids* charmer Chris O'Dowd steal two scenes as a schmuck trying to woo Portman. Minn Guð, man.

As Thor matures, his ego shrinks, along with his identity. Lacking Iron Man's wit, the Hulk's brains and the Captain's ideals, he's in peril of going *poof* himself if the franchise doesn't figure out how to capitalize on its most glorious hero. But there's one scene, a Viking burial at the end of the world, in which *The Dark World* shows the emotional potential of the berserker, beautiful Norse epic we've yet to see. Thor might not be immortal, but he's the only Avenger with the operatic ambition to reach, literally, for the heavens.

THOR: THE DARK WORLD

was directed by Alan Taylor; written by Christopher L. Yost, Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely; and stars Chris Hemsworth, Natalie Portman, Tom Hiddleston, Idris Elba, Christopher Eccleston, Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje, Kat Dennings, Ray Stevenson, Anthony Hopkins and Chris O'Dowd. Rated PG-13.

CUE "IMMIGRANT SONG" ...



JAY MAIDMENT/© 2013 MVL/FLC. TM & © 2013

opening

ABOUT TIME Richard Curtis has so much to tell us about life. Seize the day! Show people you love them before it's too late! Don't let the right one get away! His movies become restless jumbles of exclamation points panto-mimed by actors. Some still work like gangbusters (*Four Weddings and a Funeral*). Others are so gummed up with allegedly colorful types with adorable romantic problems that they meld into a sort of rom-com mulch (*Love Actually*). *About Time* is dreadful in many, though not all, ways. Tim (Domhnall Gleeson) is the scion of an eccentric but genteel English family that likes to have lunch on the beach near their rambling family estate every day, summer and winter. But don't hate him just yet: His father is played by Curtis favorite Bill

Nighy—always a good thing—and when Tim turns 21, Dad informs him that the men in the family share a gift: They can travel back in time, but only to moments they've already experienced. Tim uses this power to fine-tune his awkwardness with girls into a kind of stealth courtship. When he opens his mouth and something stupid comes out, he can just reel back a few minutes. That's how he lands Mary (Rachel McAdams), a clumsy-cute publishing type who of course has no clue about Tim's unusual gift. Gleeson—son of the superb Brendan Gleeson—is that rare movie commodity, a fairly charismatic redheaded actor. Curtis uses the time-travel device to achieve a number of aims, not all of them wretched, but he's always putting quotation marks around things, squeezing every dramatic drop out of even the most pedestrian device.

(R) Stephanie Zacharek. *Countywide*. **GREAT EXPECTATIONS** Besides its cast, a parade of Brit aces the likes of which we haven't seen since the last episode of *Wizard Boy Has a Sad*, the quality that most distinguishes Mike Newell's adaptation of the best-titled of all English novels is its healthy fullness. In the decades since David Lean's definitive film, one of those rare cases of genius adapting genius, *Great Expectations* has again and again been given something like a greatest hits treatment: criminal on the marsh, playtime at Miss Havisham's, the rotted-through wedding finery, the little girl whose heart is ice, "I say, it's grand to be a gentleman, mysterious benefactor!" Those scenes are grand here, too, but Newell subsumes them into the fuller story, emphasizing character and feeling, never getting caught up in that plummy puddings-and-corsets Christmaside pageantry that strangles so many takes on Dickens. He finds the vital heart of most scenes and gives us many fine portraits: Robbie Coltrane plays Jaggers, that unknowable lawyer, as a man-made force of nature, the agent through whom the whims of the moneyed become lawful fact; Ben Lloyd-Hughes as the louche of London's gentlemen class is the perfect demonstration of the destructive pointlessness of Pip's fantasy of being a moneyed, idle fancypants. Then there are the principals. Helena Bonham Carter and the filmmakers approach Miss Havisham not as a brittle septuagenarian but as a brilliant, cruel, scheming, still-alluring woman of means relishing her own theatrical decay—and the power such *Grey Gardens* madness gives her over the timid relatives in her orbit. Newell's film doesn't supplant Lean's, of course, but it's the best since, rich in feeling and dark beauty, alive with the superior scenecraft. **(PG-13)** Alan Scherstuhl. *Countywide*.

LAST VEGAS A new iteration of the dude-bro Dionysian comedy, *Last Vegas* is a reverse Mentos commercial in which the clever old people have to outwit the entitled, selfish young people in order to get into the nightclub or yank a casino's penthouse suite away from a formerly respectable hip-hop artist now slumming in lazy, mid-budget comedies. Presumably, the cast's enthusiasm to work together was greater than their enthusiasm for the script, a sitcom-level tissue of broad jokes, flat gags, and lazy

coincidences. But what the film has in spades is charm, its four co-stars leveraging obvious mutual admiration and roughly 160 man-years of comic experience for some genuine onscreen chemistry. When 70-year-old bachelor Billy (Michael Douglas) proposes to his much younger girlfriend—at a funeral, while delivering the eulogy—his three childhood friends insist on throwing him the same Las Vegas bachelor party he'd thrown in their honor decades before. Sam (Kevin Kline), who hasn't boned his wife in a decade, gets tacit permission to cheat during the long weekend. Paddy (Robert De Niro) is in extended mourning for his deceased wife. And Archie (Morgan Freeman, who is the greatest), a twice-divorced stroke survivor in fear of recurrence, has consigned himself to a hermetic life in his overprotective son's home. The film's hidden asset is the luminous Mary Steenburgen, funny and gorgeous as an empty-nest mom turned lounge chanteuse who beguiles the dudes with age-appropriate flirting and arch humor. The characters are totally passive—money, drinks, women, and unexpected acclaim shower down on the elder-bros like Werther's Originals from God's own cardigan pocket, completely unearned by the characters or the screenplay. **(PG-13)** Chris Packham. *Countywide*.

THOR: THE DARK WORLD See "The God Who Slummed on Earth," page 29.

ongoing

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS Tom Hanks has built a career out of playing aggressively noble roles, so it's only natural to want to see him taken down a peg. But it's no fun to watch him suffer at the hands of Somali pirates in Paul Greengrass' true-life adventure *Captain Phillips*, adapted from Richard Phillips' memoir. Still, Hanks can be a marvelous performer, and here he lets out one hell of a quiet roar. Hanks plays the commander of the Maersk Alabama, a U.S. cargo ship en route to Kenya beset by Somali pirates. After trying to negotiate with these aggressive, trigger-happy extortionists, he somehow persuades them to release the ship and its crew in exchange for the wad of cash stashed in the ship's safe. The solution, of course, isn't as simple as that, and the ordeal that unfolds over the next five days involves further fruitless negotiation, countless bumps and bruises, and, ultimately, bloodshed of the sort Robert Louis

Stevenson never imagined. Especially for a modern adventure movie, *Captain Phillips* is spectacularly well-made: Greengrass has given us serious-minded pictures (*Bloody Sunday*, *United 93*) and entertainments that skitter and scamper across rooftops and continents (*The Bourne Supremacy*, *The Bourne Ultimatum*), and he's adept at keeping things moving without gumming up the works. Greengrass attempts to humanize the pirates, and his actors—particularly Barkhad Abdi as the leader, Muse, and Barkhad Abdirahman as addled teenager Bilal—are superb. But Captain Phillips gets dangerously close to making a "these people just can't help themselves" defense, which is a particularly subtle, if unintentional, kind of racism. **(PG-13)** Stephanie Zacharek. *Countywide*.

CARRIE Kimberly Peirce changes almost nothing in her rallying remake of Brian De Palma's classic about a troubled telekinetic teenager. She doesn't have to. Yes, now the mean girls who pelt Carrie with tampons upload a cell phone video of the attack, and the well-meaning jock who squires the school outcast to prom compares himself to Tim Tebow. But the big difference is the culture around Carrie. In 2013, bullying is the hot-topic high school problem—even Justin Bieber bravely called it "a terrible thing"—which gives Peirce, the empathetic director of *Boys Don't Cry*, the audience's blessing to make Carrie's anguished vengeance extra gory. Star Chloë Grace Moretz doesn't have the alien eeriness of young Sissy Spacek, who was 26 and married when she played the doomed virgin. A beautiful, broad-shouldered blonde who's already slain 80 dudes onscreen in *Kick-Ass* and *Kick-Ass 2*, Moretz has to work harder to sell Carrie's victim status, hunching herself in half, crossing her elbows tight across her chest, and frizzing her hair into a poof. It doesn't quite work, so it's a relief to see her smile when her gym teacher (Judy Greer) convinces her she'd be gorgeous with a little blush. We all know what's coming, which makes Moretz's tentative fantasies of acceptance as gutting as the indiscriminate massacre that follows. After the betrayed girl slams shut the gymnasium doors, we can't help but think of the elaborate kill lists that school shooters leave behind before they give up and just start spraying everyone. **(R)** Amy Nicholson. *Countywide*.

THE COUNSELOR The *Counselor* is the cumbersome end product of a high-minded writer trying to slum and a slick director aiming for cosmic depth. In his first original screenplay written directly for the screen, novelist Cormac McCarthy takes a holiday from the apocalyptic portentousness of his *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road* adaptations, instead giving us a wet-lipped drug dealer (Javier Bardem) with hedgehog hair and a pastel-hued, cactus-laden mansion; a pair of deadly cheetahs; and a constricting weapon that slowly severs heads. What hasn't been lost is McCarthy's wordy speechifying, which undoubtedly aroused director Ridley Scott. The look of *The Counselor* is smeary and smoggy, as if shot during one long, hot, dirty Los Angeles morning. Yet amid Scott's chronic fetishizing of various macho odd jobs, from alloying liquid metals to removing bullets, are long-winded monologues about the inherent evil in all of us. It's a bit like attending Sunday school in a bordello. Aside from its enjoyably bleak ending, *The Counselor* generates few thrills, mainly because its pawn—a corrupt lawyer undone by a botched Mexican drug deal—is played by Michael Fassbender, a steely, intimidating figure who looks merely

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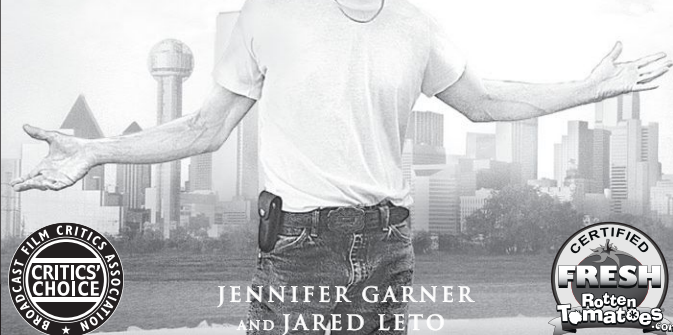
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EDITORS KURT AND BART DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN MAC MURPHY MUSIC BY MARTIN PENSA EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JOHN PAINO PRODUCED BY YVES BELANGER CSC PRODUCED BY MICHAEL SLEED
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sulky when he's supposed to be in peril. Cameron Diaz, as Bardem's two-faced wife, trips over her character's Barbadian accent, and over impossible lines like "it's our faintness of heart that drives us to the edge of ruin." But she still proves irresistible; her angular cheekbones and feline pout resemble Sophia Loren's, and her spry, gymnastic performance—in one sequence, she straddles a whole windshield—is the brightest spot in this joylessly seedy enterprise. (R) Sam Weisberg. *Countywide*.

DALLAS BUYERS CLUB Matthew McConaughey lost 40 pounds to play AIDS victim, entrepreneur, and ad-hoc activist Ron Woodruff in *Dallas Buyers Club*. His figure is so attenuated you can almost hear his bones crackling; his gait is that of a slow-motion alien, his neck one long stretch of tendons. But there's never a moment when you don't see the whole person. McConaughey's Woodruff is a fully rounded "y'all go fuck yourselves" folk hero. Woodruff was a real person, an electrician from Dallas diagnosed with HIV in 1985—he'd contracted the virus from a forgotten heterosexual encounter—and given 30 days to live. *Dallas Buyers Club*, directed by Jean-Marc Vallée, shows how Woodruff fought. Unable to partake of the then-experimental AZT, he began obtaining the drug through back channels, selling it at a profit to those in need, and also using it to keep himself alive. Previously, Woodruff had seen AIDS as "the gay disease." But the more he

learned about the virus and its possible treatments, the more he came to care about his fellow sufferers. What's remarkable about *Dallas Buyers Club* is its lack of sentimentality. The movie, like its star, is all angles and elbows, earning its emotion through sheer pragmatism. Woodruff, a man with a job to do, enlists help from a number of acquaintances, usually by first taking advantage of them. They include his physician, Eve Saks (Jennifer Garner), and a fellow AIDS patient named Rayon (Jared Leto), a transsexual who, in a marvelous scene, manages to both charm and challenge the (at first) aggressively homophobic Woodruff. They begin a business partnership that evolves into a friendship, bickering like the Honeymooners all the way. (R) Stephanie Zacharek. *Edwards University Town Center 6, Irvine*.

ESCAPE PLAN In *First Blood*, Richard Crenna plays Trautman, a harbinger figure whose function is to explain to the antagonists—and the audience—that John Rambo is "a man who's been trained to ignore pain, ignore weather, to live off the land, to eat things that would make a billy goat puke!" If Trautman wandered into director Mikael Häfström's *Escape Plan*, he would probably never shut up about how smart Sylvester Stallone's Breslin is. "He finished *Gravity's Rainbow* while defending his thesis! He's been trained to catalyze reagents that would make niobium oxidize!" Even without him, the script

takes pains to elevate the smartness of all the film's muscley dudes. For one thing, they get to hang around the wonderful Amy Ryan, who raises the average intelligence of any room she occupies. 50 Cent plays the world's best "cyber thug," his brilliance conveyed via wearing glasses. Arnold Schwarzenegger enters with a literary reference. And in the film's opening sequence, Breslin, a hypertrophic polymath hired to test prison facilities, ghosts his way out of solitary confinement using unapologetic MacGyver tactics. The film's insecurity about the characters' intellects is probably because of its generosity with punching—the punching is great, and frequent. Whenever the characters need to distract prison guards, they create punching-based diversions, ultimately punching their way right out of jail. The plot is a no-frills escape from a Guantanamo-like supermax prison evilly administered by Jim Caviezel. With its fun script and cheap visuals, *Escape Plan* evokes the halfwit cheesiness of 1980s-era Canon films, but it also recalls the deft pacing and legibility of their action sequences. (R) Chris Packham. *Countywide*.

THE FIFTH ESTATE Maybe you've thought, "Wow, Benedict Cumberbatch as Julian Assange—I'd like to see that." The good news: Deep into *The Fifth Estate* you actually do, when Cumberbatch faces a camera straight-on and acts for a good 40 seconds. He's marvelous, his Assange equal parts charisma and nerves, moral zeal and pushy self-righteousness. Cumberbatch speaks in a put-upon gush, his Assange sick of all the time people waste by making him spell out the truths he considers self-evident. He might be that good the rest of the movie, too. But I defy you to say for sure. Other than that brief scene, his every moment is diced up by reckless, senseless cuts, none revealing anything more than director Bill Condon's fear that we're bored. *The Fifth Estate* follows Daniel Domscheit-Berg (Daniel Brühl), Assange's early partner and here a milquetoast audience surrogate, from WikiLeaks' first info-dumps right up to the 2010 release of tens of thousands of U.S. documents. Assange starts heroic and inspiring, liberating Domscheit-Berg from a job he hates for the work of exposing corruption

and speaking truth to power. But then Assange turns megalomaniac and needs some truth told to him, too. Like J.J. Abrams' TV dramas, *The Fifth Estate* opens at its most interesting moment and then flashes way back to show how we got there. There's the boho Euro underground hacker culture, the panicked U.S. State Department exposition-deliverers (including Laura Linney!), even something of a countdown clock. It all hews so closely to template that it's easy to imagine that paperclip from Microsoft Word popped up on Condon's desktop one day and said, "It looks like you're directing a techno-thriller. Would you like help?" (R) Alan Scherstuhl. *Century Stadium 25, Orange*.

FREE BIRDS *Free Birds*, an animated wingding from director Jimmy Hayward (*Horton Hears a Who!*), offers a vision of a kinder, gentler Thanksgiving. Reggie (voiced by Owen Wilson) is a young turkey with a higher-than-average IQ, which means he knows his days are numbered. But Reggie sees a way out when the President comes through town to pardon one lucky turkey. (As voiced by Hayward, he's a Bill Clinton sound-alike with a cheerful corndog drawl.) Reggie is lucky enough to be the chosen bird, and he's whisked off to Camp David, where he's introduced to the pleasures of TV and pizza delivery. No turkey ever had it so good. But fate intervenes in the form of a bigger, more ambitious turkey named Jake (Woody Harrelson), who urges the reluctant Reggie to travel back in time and alter mankind's holiday-eating habits. Via a giant talking space egg named S.T.E.V.E. (that stands for Space Time Exploration Vehicle Envoy, and its voice belongs to George Takei), they whiz back to Plymouth circa 1621, where they try to destroy the gunpowder stash of Myles Standish (Colm Meaney) to keep turkeykind safe from his muskets. Their plan goes awry, and they're saved by a plucky girl-turkey named Jenny (Amy Poehler). She serves as Reggie's love interest, though she's also destined for great things within her own turkey tribe. *Free Birds* is so unhinged that it could almost work. It doesn't, at least not after Reggie leaves the comfort of Camp David behind. Like so many animated features these days, *Free Birds* tries to pack too much in; the picture

feels cramped and cluttered, and, despite its occasionally manic action, it moves as slowly as a fattened bird waddling toward its doom. (PG) Stephanie Zacharek. *Countywide*.

JACKASS PRESENTS: BAD GRANDPA Think *Little Miss Sunshine* could have used an elastic penis? Behold: *Bad Grandpa*, in which a widower and an eight-year-old drive across the country hitting on chicks, farting in diners, and getting granddad's manhood stuck in a vending machine before sending the boy out in drag to perform a striptease at a kiddie beauty pageant. The stars, Johnny Knoxville and Jackson Nicoll, are comedians; the extras are unsuspecting victims just going about their day in a park when the Jackass creator tootles up in convincing liver spots to land, then fellate, a four-foot fish. Like Borat, the joke is on the American need-to-please. How long will these real-life bingo players, funeral singers, and male strippers tolerate Knoxville's antics? Very long. No one even calls the cops when he and the kid perch on a picnic bench and chug a six-pack of beer. But the joke is really on Knoxville, who, despite flinging himself through a glass wall and rigging up a fake poo-sprayer in his pants, gets fewer laughs than his boy sidekick. An unknown child actor, Nicoll has soulful eyes and an almost frightening deadpan composure. When he begs strangers to be his new dad, they're legitimately unnerved (but they still abandon him on the street). By *Jackass* standards, *Bad Grandpa* is benign—it's neither as fun nor as thrilling as watching Knoxville play tetherball with a beehive. But Nicoll deserves as much applause as *Sunshine*'s Abigail Breslin. Put him in a remake of *The Bicycle Thief* and the kid could win an Oscar. (R) Amy Nicholson. *Countywide*.

PRISONERS If five Oscar nominees lose two young girls in the woods, will their wailing make a sound? That's the key question of *Prisoners*, Denis Villeneuve's prestigious puffery about a father (Hugh Jackman) and a cop (Jake Gyllenhaal) trying to catch a kidnapper. *Prisoners* is a dog-whistle for Academy voters. It might work, except that a) it makes no sense, and b) it's not from Clint Eastwood, the only director with enough swagger to demand such schlock be taken seriously. Our setting is a gray Pennsylvania town, where an ordinary man like Keller (Jackman) can teach his son to hunt in case a hurricane blows civilization away. Keller is a survivalist with an innate certainty that he can do better than the experts. That includes Detective Loki (Gyllenhaal), charged with tracking down Keller's daughter, Anna (Erin Gerasimovich), and neighbor girl Joy (Kyla Drew Simmons) after they go missing. Initially, Keller begs Loki to help him make sense of the facts: Why did local weirdo Alex Jones (Paul Dano), a childlike near-mute, try to escape when questioned by the police? And why can't Loki keep him in custody? Loki brushes him off with police platitudes. He doesn't realize Keller may take matters, er, make that Alex—into his own hands. And fists. And homemade torture chambers. Villeneuve is interested in the raw ugliness of human desperation, and parts of the film get so bleak that it's surprising to realize it's not a remake of something Swedish. But when human complexities get in the way of screenwriter Aaron Guzikowski's plot twists, he and Villeneuve just throw away the parts that don't fit, hollowing out the story's internal logic. (R) Amy Nicholson. *Countywide*.

PETER TRAVERS, *RollingStone*

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Photo Finish

Cal State Fullerton's Begovich Gallery offers a gripping exhibit on Victorian-era death portraits

BY DAVE BARTON

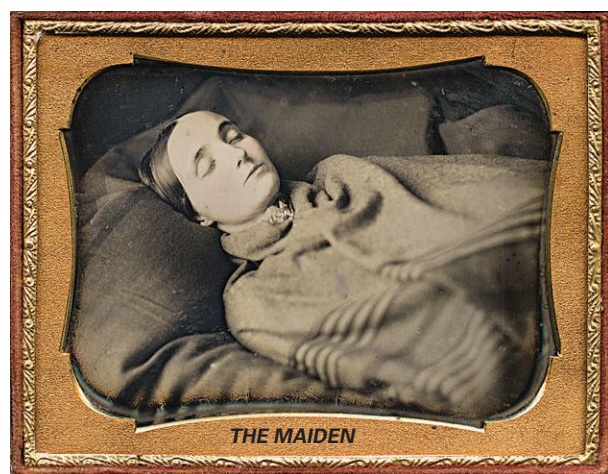
It's Nov. 2, Día de los Muertos—the Mexican Day of the Dead. I've spent the early afternoon with friends on Fourth Street in Santa Ana for the annual Noche de Altares, helping to build an altar that honors family and friends who have passed away. Covered with framed photos, *ofrendas* of food, flowers, incense, liquor, cigarettes and miniature sugar skulls (offered to attract the spirits of the faithful departed), the often elaborate

not everyone could afford one, so there are instances in which the deceased are posed sitting in chairs, "reading" books; "resting" on a couch; or, in the case of children, lying in the arms of a living parent as though sleeping. Gruesome to some, the raw loss in the eyes of the stiffly posed survivors is often harder to take than the image of a dead body.

With easy access to graphic pictures of death and destruction on the Internet, is this just more of the same, an appeal to morbid voyeurism? A dog whistle for Goths who think the cessation of breath and brain activity is something cool and romantic? No. While black-clad, tattooed alterna-types were omnipresent in the Begovich Gallery's "Beyond the Dark Veil: Post Mortem and Mourning Photography," curator Jacqueline Bunge Barger has taken almost 200 photos from the Thanatos Archive

to create a strong overview of the movement, as well as providing a thoughtfully somber, historical context.

There are a few small quibbles: Since the majority of the pictures are from the 1800s, some are fading with age or of a less-than-perfect quality. The dim lighting in the gallery that so successfully provides mood for the exhibit can be hard on those who forget their glasses; the lack of magnifying lenses and the often-sharp glare on the cases can make details difficult to decipher, especially noticeable when dealing with the small, shiny surface of tintypes. Compounding those little distractions is the issue of the biographical information: It's always posted at the beginning or end of the long display cases. As thorough as it is, it would have been more accessible displayed directly above the photographs.



altares resemble colorful mixed-media art installations. At night, votives flicker and glow as if tiny spirits were trying to remind us they haven't gone anywhere.

It's been 15 years since my friend Ty called to tell me he'd been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. I was concerned, but he was so young (late 20s) and the disease so slow-acting I figured the disability and eventual death that would result would be a long time coming. Little did either of us know it wasn't MS, but rather a fast-acting brain tumor that rapidly began to take away his eyesight, make him halt in his step, bloat him from steroids, and then kill him. He had married just before his diagnosis, and when his wife called to tell me he'd died suddenly in her arms a short time after a recent, presumed successful brain surgery, I was floored. At his funeral, the casket was open, but I intentionally arrived late, not wanting to see him inside it. While immersed in my grief, I couldn't look at my friend's body. I could, however, look at the dead bodies of others.

I started collecting postmortem photographs, specifically Victorian-era portraits of the dead. A new process at the time, photography was often the last resource for remembrance, the idea being that the picture of a loved one's corpse was better than no picture at all. The standard image was the family member in a casket, but

It may not have been as aesthetically pleasing as the display cases and black walls look at present, but the viewer also wouldn't have to sprint back and forth between picture and info to understand what they're looking at.



Recently, I've been thinking about selling the 100-odd postmortem photos I've collected over the past 15 years since Ty passed away, feeling as though I've come to terms with the reasons why I bought them in the first place. I thought I'd outgrown the mourning, but after the weekend at Noche de Altares, my time at the Begovich and a Monday-morning walk through a marigold-strewn section of Fairhaven Memorial Park, I realized such thinking is kind of fruitless. We may deal with loss in any number of ways—collecting photos, decorating altars or just holding on to the memories—but if you really loved someone, why should you "get over it"? Those altars will only grow bigger as our lives (and losses) continue. The only way to honor the dead is to not close yourself off and pretend it's not happening, but to hold your arms open in welcome, letting those memories and images fill the hole in your heart. The Victorians were wrong about many things, but they had the right idea here.

"BEYOND THE DARK VEIL: POST MORTEM AND MOURNING PHOTOGRAPHY"

at Cal State Fullerton's Begovich Gallery, 800 N. State College Blvd., Fullerton, (657) 278-7750. Open Mon.-Thurs., noon-4 p.m.; Sat., noon-2 p.m. Through Dec. 12. Free. Membership access to the Thanatos Archive can be had at www.thanatos.net.

TRENDZILLA
» LP HASTINGS

Sugar, Sugar

Whoever decided Americans ought to have hairless bodies was being a jerk. No one disagrees that French women are sexy, and look at those pits! You'd think we'd be used to defoliation, though, given humans have removed body hair since building the pyramids. But, apparently, Pharaoh were smarter than us shaving/waxing/Nairing folks; they used sugaring to eliminate hair before these lesser techniques even existed.

Yet the process was virtually nonexistent in OC until the past couple of years. It's similar to waxing in that you remove hair by applying a viscous substance to the skin, then pulling it off—but 10,000 times better for you. Instead of a sickly orange chemical, sugaring uses only three ingredients: sugar, water and lemon. The mixture is heated until it becomes a soft-yellow ball of caramel, and then it's spread over the skin.

Some sugarists use applicators, but Dillan O'Neal, owner of Sugar Sugar By Dillan in Costa Mesa, is a purist. Her sugar cottage (which we incidentally named Best Sugaring in our Best Of issue this year), built in 1908, looks straight out of the 1950s and is incredibly cozy. She says sugaring is best done by hand so that body heat rubs it into every pore. "In estheticians' school, you have to do 400 hours of waxing, and it completely destroyed my skin," O'Neal says, "so I had to start searching for a gentler method."

But don't think its simplicity means you can do it at home; sugaring is a learned technique, and O'Neal has seen the experience spoiled by not going to experts. "It's all about comfort," she says.

Don't get us wrong: Sugaring is a bit painful—but only the first time. After that, the hair grows back softer, finer and slower, making it easier to pull out. Plus, the process removes only hair, so you'll never be left tender from the first layer of your dermis gone missing, as with waxing. Sugaring also eliminates blackheads and exfoliates, making your skin oh-so-soft.

"I have clients who spent thousands [of dollars] on laser hair removal, and it never worked," O'Neal says. "It seems trivial, but being smooth really gives people more confidence." And O'Neal's shop is all about that. Maybe those anti-hair jerks aren't so bad after all. . . .

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Ice, Ice Buggy

Wait, Vanilla Ice is going Amish? Word to ya mutha
BY ALI LERMAN

When you hear the moniker Vanilla Ice, inevitably your mind presses play on the tune “Ice Ice Baby.” Hey, you’re not alone. For most of us, his mark on the hip-hop world was an undeniable part of our youth—the notched eyebrows, the parachute pants, the corny ’80s break beats, etc. But fast forward, and these days, Vanilla Ice (a.k.a. Robert Van Winkle) is *sooo* much more than music. He’s a force to be reckoned with in the building and real-estate industries, and since his show *The Vanilla Ice Project* has been such a hit on the DIY Network, they decided to add another series to his roster. As of last month, Ice kicks it old school—very old school—for *Vanilla Ice Goes Amish*.

But he hasn’t left his musical roots too far behind. If you want to showcase your best running man skills, he’ll be at the Nokia Theatre on Saturday for the Old School Reunion show, featuring Stevie B, Lisa Lisa, Biz Markie and more. You won’t want to miss this.

OC WEEKLY: *We’ll get to the music in a minute, but I have to know about your new show. Where did the idea for Vanilla Ice Goes Amish come from?*

VANILLA ICE: [Laughs.] Well, I just wanted to do something kind of crazy since I’ve been a licensed builder and I’ve been building homes for 18 years. I really enjoy craftsmanship and carpentry work, and I know the Amish pride themselves on that. So I kind of wanted to go out there and intern with them. It started off as a joke, but then we sent one of the network guys out there to talk to the bishop to see if it was okay. We weren’t even sure if it was going to happen. After it was cleared with the bishop, the neighbors and a whole gang of people accepted me, and I actually went in with a true Amish family. We just wanted to assure them that we wanted to showcase what they love, their lifestyle, their heritage, and learn why they’ve held on to it this long. My other show, *The Vanilla Ice Project*, is all of the latest and greatest in technology, and this one meets the old world with the Amish, so it was a great thing.

Well, props on being well-rounded—it’s truly awesome. I’m also pretty excited about the Old School Reunion you’re doing. It has quite the lineup!

Oh, it’s a trip down memory lane! You can enjoy all of the stuff on the charts from some acts in the ’80s, and it carries over into the ’90s. It’s going to be an awesome time! We’re going to play some of the new stuff, too, so it’s not going to be just old school. We’re definitely going to take them back though with “Ice Ice Baby,” “Ninja Rap,” “Play That Funky Music,” and maybe a little “Stop That Train.” We’re going to have a lot of fun, and that’s what it’s all about. Just

GO, WHITE BOY, GO!



entertaining and smiles for everyone! *It’s crazy because you inspired people to shave lines in their eyebrows back in the day, and now you’re inspiring on a whole other level. Now that you’re a little older, do you still have the dance moves?*

Awww, thank you. You know, we are who we are because of who we were. Yesterday’s history, and tomorrow’s a mystery, so you just have to take life day by day and smile as much as possible and enjoy life. And yeah, I still have the moves, but they hurt a little more now. [Laughs.] I can still do them, though; it’s like riding a bike—you don’t forget. I did the Transformer

the other day, and I popped it and I locked it, I went down to my knees and I spun around, and then I got back up, and was like, “Ouch!” So it hurts more, but I can still do it!

VANILLA ICE

performs as part of the Old School Reunion at Nokia Theatre, 777 Chick Hearn Court, Los Angeles, (213) 763-6030; www.nokiathatrelalive.com. Sat., 8 p.m. \$49.50-\$95. All ages. *Vanilla Ice Goes Amish* airs on the DIY Network; check local listings for times. For more info, go to www.Vanillalce.com and follow him on Twitter: @Vanillalce.

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CARA ROBBINS

Getting Warmer

Cold War Kids prep for a new record, realize that growing up means lightening up

BY NATE JACKSON

The eerie ability to suck the noise out of a room has long been a specialty of the Cold War Kids. With four records, a handful of EPs and countless tours in their back pocket, their fans are well-trained to respect the silence of a strained, soulful ballad; a piano-plunking allegory; and Nathan Willett's brooding tales about drunk dads, loners, charlatans and cowards. The title track from their EP *Tuxedos* is par for the course—all the masked pain of showing up stag at a wedding wrapped in a pretty, sparsely adorned melody. It's the kind of song designed for drunk tears at 2 a.m. between the bitter end of the reception and the rush to pray at the porcelain altar of a hotel toilet.

"There's a loneliness that comes with being at a wedding when you don't have a mate," Willett says. "It's something I've experienced so many times, and I know it's a real deep hollowness that you feel that that song really embodies."

But even though it falls right in line with past records, including the haunting handful of studio outtakes and cover songs strung together to make the new EP, the track "Tuxedos" actually feels a little out of place in the context of their fourth full-length effort, *Dear Miss Lonelyhearts*. We're

"Normally, we finish a record, and we're like, 'Aww, man this is great.' . . . Then you go out and tour it for a year, and you're at more of a festival-type setting, and you're like, 'Where are the hard rockers?'"

seeing a more upbeat Cold War Kids lately—a band that is willing to trade a bit of the bluesy, minimalist twang for swells of synthesizer, major key guitar strumming and proud, pop hooks, emphasizing strength over sorrow. It's a sure sign that for this band, maturity also means lightening up and cranking the music up a little louder.

"Normally, we finish a record, and we're like, 'Aww, man this is great,'" Willett says. "Then you go out and tour it for a year, and you're at more of a festival-type setting, and you're like, 'Where are the hard rockers? Where are the songs that really hit and drive?'"

It's a concern that Willett, bassist Matt Maust, drummer Matt Aveiro and new guitarist Dann Gallucci can't wait to address as they steam toward the end of a long tour. They plan to hole themselves up in their San Pedro studio to crank out a fifth album, but

not before taking a final bow in front of a hometown crowd in Santa Ana at the Observatory on Friday. This gig smacks of an equally gratifying exchange: local-boys-done-good performing at a venue owned by Jon Reiser, the same guy who helped give Cold War Kids their start during the heyday of Detroit Bar in the mid-aughts.

"I remember our friend [producer] Matt Wignall told us at one point there's this moment in time when your friends come to every show and it feels like a movement, it feels like a scene, and everyone is in this thing together," Willett says. "It's awesome, but there's only a window of time for this, so you have to think about how to take it somewhere beyond this."

In those days, before the word *hipster* became such a loaded term, the band, originally based in Whittier and Fullerton, unintentionally became the poster children for a new movement in which bands tripped over themselves to play a specific brand of indie rock fueled by minimalism, scarves and skinny jeans. The culture that adored the *Mulberry Street* EP and especially their 2006 full-length debut, *Robbers and Cowards*, couldn't help but use the group's early releases as the standard by which the music scene and the band

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

TRUE STORY

» JACK GRISHAM

The Writers

For every Kerouac, there are a thousand foul-smelling travelers clogging our coffee bars with unkempt hair and notebooks that reek of patchouli and medicinal weed—and as for Bukowski, there was one, "the Big Bukowski." His imitators are nothing more than foul-mouthed obnoxious Hanks wallowing in cheap booze. I've seen them, talking their shit, bragging of their prowess with prose—bitch, please, the only thing these wannabe writers are prolific at is urinating—15-minute-long streams of 20-proof slop cascading from beer-shrunk cocks and being voraciously gobbled up by water-saving urinals. Now, I'm not saying you shouldn't follow your dreams—I support your futility—I'm just saying that you need to stop trying to re-create someone else's reality because unlike stars in the sky—each of which shines so heavenly—the majority of us are just human . . .

"Hey, what's cha doing man?" I smelled the foul stench before I looked into the glazed eyes of a traveler. "You're a writer now, huh?"

"No," I replied. "I'm a hack."

"What?"

"I mean, this isn't my dream. I lived my dream, and now I just document the remnants of what I used to be—sadly, the majority of which has been lost in a maze of scar tissue and a cavalcade of lies that I concocted to hide the pain."

"Wow."

"Yeah," I continued, "and, as a matter of fact, I was just writing about you."

"Me?"

"Yeah, right here." I moved my hand away from the paper so he could get a glimpse of the piece. "It says that you dirty travelers clog the coffee bars and bug the fuck out of me. Have a nice day."

I dismissed him to go beg in the street.

"I'm writing a book." The lady who just piped in was sitting two wooden chairs over and had been listening in as I berated the hippie.

"My girlfriends said I should write a *50 Shades* thing—I've done some stuff."

I looked at her face—the used-to-be-beautiful young woman peering out from behind sagging, age-blotched skin. I could also smell the sour wine stink as she talked—her breath doing its best to second-hand intoxicate me.

"Oh," I said, "so you've sucked a lot of dick huh? Did you ever tie anybody up?"

"Yeah, I uh . . ."

"You know my last girlfriend was a hooker, too, but she came down with a nasty case of vaginitis, and it sort of shut down business for a while. Hey, how much would it cost for you to go fuck that traveler who just left here—I'll buy you a latte and a lemon bar."

"Asshole."

We can't all be artists, but we can inspire those who are—we can give them fodder as they can-non-strike their way through life, trying to enlighten those who think the pinnacle of success is the destination, when in reality, the destination is the inception of the dream as yet to be fulfilled.

Jack Grisham is an author, hypnotherapist, T.S.O.L. front man and all-around troublemaker. This column may or may not be factual, with characters who may or may not be real.

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Las Cafeteras Are More Than Música!

East LA folk-fusion band crosses internal and external borders

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

The phrase “Yo no creo en fronteras!” has become the unofficial mission statement for East LA’s eclectic folk outfit Las Cafeteras. The line from their rabble-rousing hit “La Bamba Rebelde” is an apt description of how cavalier they are about crossing stylistic and geographical borders with their music. This year alone, they’ve dabbled in mainstream pop, opened for Colombian superstar Juanes in Miami, and did a live collaboration with the LA Philharmonic. With every new step they take, the title of their 2012 release, *It’s Time*, feels more and more prophetic.

Before they became a band, the members of Las Cafeteras were students. “We were all friends, family, activists and organizers who knew each other before we even started playing music,” says Denise Carlos, who once trained as a dancer.

In the mid-2000s, Carlos, Leah Gallegos, Annette Torres, Daniel French, and brothers David and Hector Flores studied the Veracruz-based, West African-influenced Mexican tradition of son jarocho at free classes offered by a friend at El Sereno’s Eastside Café. Years later, the co-ed crew, with the addition of Jose Cano, named their group after the space that molded them.

Though they struggled to forge an identity, they eventually crafted a sound anchored in the instrumentation of son jarocho but incorporating other forms of expression such as hip-hop, Native American music and cumbia rhythms. The band’s big opportunities and successes affirmed their risk-taking decisions. “It’s proof to us that there’s a hunger for [not only] this sound, but also the message that we’re putting out there,” Carlos says.

That message includes immigrant-rights issues, the politics of the Chicano Movement, and the stories of the neighborhoods in which they grew up. “It’s a remixed perspective of what it means to be Chicano,”

says French, a vocalist and jaranero who says his band is like Gogol Bordello-meets-acoustic East Los. Las Cafeteras’ recent *More Than Music* tour took them to Canada, where they also chose to incorporate poetry and storytelling workshops at the colleges where they performed.

“A lot of folks have never shared something they’ve written, especially so personal, with a group of people before,” French says. “We also did a zapateado workshop, and some of the students came up and performed with us on one of our songs. We’re really open to our space being shared and border-crossing between audience and performer.”

Gradually, the band became part of a new generation of contemporary artists from East LA, including La Santa Cecilia, La Chamba and Irene Diaz, among others. Earlier this year at Self Help Graphics in Boyle Heights, the group experienced an unforgettable moment in that spirit. “We were able to play ‘La Bamba Rebelde’ with Los Lobos!” Carlos excitedly recounts of the improvisation initiated by the legendary, veteran musicians who popularized “La Bamba,” son jarocho’s most well-known song, in the Ritchie Valens biopic of the same name. “For them to say that they were passing the torch to us was amazing.”

While Las Cafeteras prepare for a new album, they are still taken aback at how far they’ve come as a band. “I think it’s a beautiful thing that something can grow from a very organic community class,” says Carlos, “to being onstage, where people are applauding you for singing and playing.”

LAS CAFETERAS

perform as part of MEChA’s Día de los Muertos celebration at Cal State Fullerton’s Humanities Quad, 800 N. State College Blvd., Fullerton, (657) 278-3846. Thurs., Nov. 7, 8 p.m. Free. All ages.

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TORCHES

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For plenty of local indie-rock bands, opportunities such as meeting the National's Matt Berninger would be a highlight of the year. But for Torches' Azad Cheikosman and Eric Fabbro, shaking hands and posing for pictures with one of their idols is only a small sample of what's fueling their fire as musicians these days.

Since January, the duo has toured the country, released an EP, played festivals and headlined a residency at the lauded Echo in Los Angeles, all the while creating an insatiable momentum that continues to grow exponentially both in Southern California and nationally. "We've found that in some places, like Kansas City and spots in the Midwest, people are really eager when a new band comes into town," Cheikosman says. "They're just down for new music, maybe because there's nothing to do?"

He laughs, but there's definitely plenty of truth to that. In Southern California, we're spoiled by the amount of great music accessible to us. "[Playing those cities] definitely proved a point to us," Cheikosman continues. "After each show, we sold a lot of merch; our mailing list filled up almost every night in some of those areas; it was great."

However, life on the road isn't always that rewarding. "There are definitely nights when we're playing for maybe 10 or 15 people in Albuquerque, New Mexico," the singer/guitarist laments. "[That] happened on the last tour. You kind of just have to get into it. . . . You have to play every show like it's your last and like it means something. You want to leave people with something they'll remember."

This mindset is what first conjured the buzz surrounding Torches. In the studio,

Cheikosman's vocals soar as Fabbro's drumming guides each track, but live, the two breathe new life into each song with the help of a full band. They experiment with percussion and arrangement, and Cheikosman isn't afraid to let loose, often ending the set in the crowd (or as close as he can get). It's this high energy that sets a Torches performance apart from other traditional indie bands.

Their genuine passion and sincerity shine on their records. In 2012, the duo released their debut full-length, *Head Full of Rust*, and this May they dropped the follow-up EP *Let the People Stare*. "It was almost like I was trying to connect with myself in those songs and hoping people would connect with it," Cheikosman says.

While imagery and storytelling play roles in his songwriting, personal experiences and feelings weigh the heaviest in his lyricism, and he believes Torches' next album will be their boldest statement yet. "We're about 10 songs into the [new] record," he says, "and it's everything we wanted to say. We went through a big transition last December when our bass player decided to part ways [with the band]. . . . It taught us a lot about ourselves: how to be a band, knowing what we want, and just having realistic expectations with the songs and how people are going to respond to them." As a result, the vocalist predicts this album will give the band the momentum they need to progress to the next level.

He and Fabbro have offered fans sneak peeks of new material during live performances, and they are ending the year with a slew of co-headlining Southern California shows with fellow LA darlings the Lonely Wild. The micro tour includes a night at the prestigious Echoplex and a stop at Costa Mesa's Detroit Bar; the set lists will focus primarily on new songs and possibly a few extra bodies onstage (including a violinist).

So what's in store for Torches in 2014? Aside from a sophomore full-length, they're in the market for a new van. In that regard, the band may have found a winner for their next big tour. "It's a Mercedes Sprinter," Cheikosman says proudly. "She's a beaut!"

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would continually be measured.

Along the way, Willett and company were bitten more than once by the same blog critics and fans who nurtured them. Lukewarm reviews of their past couple of records, *Loyalty to Loyalty* and *Mine Is Yours*, evolved into lambastes over Willett's heavy reliance on religious symbolism and various hallmarks of the band's sound. Though an audience turning on artists is nothing new, negative feedback definitely dogged Willett, who has admittedly paid too much attention to negative reviews in the past.

But part of eventually accepting the stardom they'd earned during the hard-charging OC/Long Beach days was learning to shake off the haters. The acclaim of *Dear Miss Lonelyhearts*—the name and concept were borrowed from a Nathanael West novel—proved the Kids still pack an emotional wallop, but in a way that doesn't feel like the same gut-punch over and over again.

Credit much of their progression to returning to their San Pedro studio to record. Connected to a dilapidated plumber's shop, it's a surprisingly vibey creative space—all high ceilings and wood floors. The den is littered with an arsenal of vintage gear. Since stum-

bling on the space years ago, it's now the compound where almost everything involving the band goes down. Maust, who does all the artwork and album covers for the band, has made it kind of like a little museum with all of his abstract paintings. It has even made a few cameos in their music videos for "Miracle Mile" and "The Audience."

"The only regret I have is that we should've started making records there sooner," Willett says. The studio's sound board is managed by Gallucci, who has replaced Jonnie Russell as the band's guitarist and took on the role of aural translator. He quickly proved to be a talented engineer who could help trans-

NO SMILING!



pose the band's new ideas without having to explain themselves to someone outside the band. The tattooed axeman was a key player (along with producer Lars Stalfors) in the construction of the more audacious sounds of *Dear Miss Lonelyhearts*. And despite it being somewhat of a transitional record for the group, the final product gave Willett plenty of confidence to chase the next one in the same way.

"We've been fortunate to record in some of the greatest studios around, and I don't regret that," Willett says. "But being able to make the last record totally digital with a limited budget, all in our own space is such a rad experience. It kinda feels like we went to doing things the way of the past, but a way that works for us."

No matter how long they've been on tour or how far away they've been, nostalgia and affection still abound when Cold War Kids' boots hit home soil. Even the drive over the bridge from San Pedro into Long Beach triggers the not-so-long-ago memories of lingering around Fingerprints, sweaty Solo cup house parties and an undeniable sense of excitement around them that stretched from OC to LA, pushing them to go bigger. Now that they have, all the traveling and endless work of being a well-oiled machine seems to pay off twice as much whenever they look into the faces of the first audience to lend them their ears, their cheers and, especially, their silence.

"When I think back to those people who did come see us at Detroit Bar seven years ago and knowing that a lot of newer fans are there, it's special," Willett says. "Whether it's hanging out and meeting people or hearing the audience banter, there's this home energy that makes things really cool onstage."

COLD WAR KIDS

perform with Hindu Pirates at the Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana, (714) 957-0600; www.observatoryoc.com. Fri., 8 p.m. \$25. All ages. For more info on Cold War Kids, visit www.coldwarbands.com.

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OF THE GREEN

Not So Strange

Audacity are scrappy, loud and less adventurous than they think
BY REYAN ALI

Kyle Gibson says the word *weird* a lot. The Audacity guitarist/vocalist uses it at least 10 times in our conversation, mostly in reference to his band's aesthetic choices, especially the music they started playing as kids around the age of 11.

"We were learning how to play together; [our band] didn't really resemble anything close to normal music," Gibson says. "It was like shitty little-kid symphonies, with never-repeating parts and no real choruses or verses—just a bunch of different parts thrown together. I mean, we listened to Blink-182 and Green Day back then and still do. But it wasn't exactly a little kid pop-punk band. It was much more deranged and nonsensical."

Technically, they weren't Audacity then. Sometime in 2001, while Gibson and guitarist/vocalist Matt Schmalfeld were in sixth grade, they formed a group with some now ex-members, calling themselves Non-Toxic. That Fullerton-rooted outfit would evolve into the Plaid, the Attachments, the Audacity and, now, officially, just Audacity. "It was always the same band," Gibson says. "It was just [us] going through different shitty names until we got stuck with the current shitty name."

He says most of their early tunes were built around "weird, folky parts [that] didn't really resemble normal songs." But as they grew, the fledgling musicians got into art-rock bands and punk music—mostly British acts such as the Adverts and Wire—and even had a saxophone player for a moment. After that, interest turned toward Redd Kross and the Replacements, and the band began "making fun music, as opposed to really weird, challenging, artsy stuff—or at least having [our music] be a combination of those things," Gibson says.

During their high-school years in the mid- and late 2000s, as other members exited, Gibson and Schmalfeld brought in drummer Thomas Alvarez and bassist Cameron Crowe. And then things started to get serious.

"We actually started playing real shows around downtown Fullerton and house parties and stuff, instead of just lame carnivals and 'battle of the bands' [events]," Gibson says. "We became more of a real,

functioning rock band, as opposed to a Kidz Bop kind of thing."

Audacity's first record, *Power Drowning*, landed in 2009 via Burger Records and garnered the four-piece attention from the press. They're frequently tagged as "garage-punk," which Gibson himself identifies the band as (while emphasizing the punk), and they do share the reckless, loud spirit of the Briefs, Cloud Nothings and Mika Miko. Audacity are also often called "lo-fi," presumably because of their output and that school of sound being one of Burger Records' calling cards. Gibson agrees that *Power Drowning* fits the lo-fi shoe, but not so much the 2012 full-length *Mellow Cruisers* and especially not *Butter Knife*, their Oct. 29 release on Suicide Squeeze Records.

In fact, *Butter Knife* shows that Audacity are still very much smitten with lo-fi. The cynical "Hole In the Sky," the bummed-out "Cold Rush," the rambunctious, Roman-candle-like "Pigs" and the snarling "Tell Yourself" are all swaddled in distortion to purposeful ends. When the group do avoid effects—such as on the pensive "Rooster" and the somber, piano-driven "Autumn"—that squall is conspicuous by its absence. Juicy hooks and sweet melodies abound all over the album, just masked under crunchy exteriors. Solid power-pop songwriting is ultimately their bread and butter, not artsy experimentation or a profound sense of oddness.

But hey, they appear to have lots of time left to implement those changes. Though Audacity have been at it for more than a decade, Gibson makes it sound as if the years haven't even begun to catch up. "In a way, we still kind of feel like kids, just playing around town when we were in high school with older bands," he says. "I don't know if it's an immaturity thing or something, but we still kind of feel like that sometimes. We've kept our youthfulness in that way."

AUDACITY

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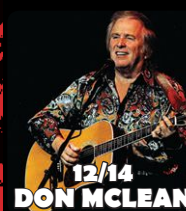
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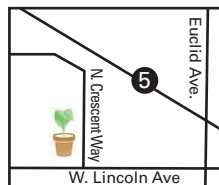
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A White Girl Walks Into a Mexican Bar ...

The Bobkin in Santa Ana is a great place to suck face—just watch it with the restrooms

A girl in a tube top and heavy makeup perched atop her boyfriend at the Bobkin in SanTana as he sat on a barstool to my left. They were ferociously sucking face. I sat there, beer in hand, remembering Jerry Seinfeld's adage about staring at cleavage. And who was this other woman in a red blouse who just sat next to them as they went at it?

We were in the industrial section of the town, in a pool hall that used to entertain working-class white men but is now exclusively Mexican. And the other patrons (myself included) were certainly not as passionate as the couple. Four of them quietly skirted around one of the many billiards tables; the bartender and a middle-aged man played cards; and my guy and I sat with matching Pacificos, soaking it all in. At the opposite end of the very long bar from where the lovers went at it was a lone, young blond woman in a black turtleneck, clutching a cocktail.

"Abusamos del Alcohol" by El Komander played on the Internet jukebox, and all four behind-the-bar TVs were tuned to a post-fútbol match gabfest on Univision. The long, spacious room was lit only by several Bud Light lamps hanging over the pool tables and the TVs. The floor—tiled in green, red and white, the colors of the Mexican flag—would make a perfect dance floor if it weren't covered with dozens and dozens of unoccupied tables and chairs. Corona flags lined the ceiling, and Corona posters dominated the lengthy walls. The bar doesn't have beers on tap, but rather a decent selection of Mexican and classic American beers. And while it features a full bar, don't expect any craft spirits at the Bobkin: tequila and whiskey rule, with most of the *hombres* sticking by their Patrón, Chivas and *bukanas* on the top shelf.

I wish I could write about how crazy it was being in a Mexi bar as a white girl, but

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The giant chandeliers hanging above the bar are awesome. Totally out of place, but awesome.

it was hardly any different from being at any of the other neighborhood bars I've covered. Yeah, we got a few looks from the customers, but that happens when you go into any dive and you're not a regular. I did start ordering in *gabacho*

Spanish—"Dos Pacificos, por favor"—but the bartender, a woman in a nice black-and-white-striped blazer, didn't have time for ESL. "Do you want salt and lime?" she responded. Sure. . .

The one thing that did stand out at the Bobkin was the bathroom. Dive-bar bathrooms are never expected to smell like peaches, but *ay caramba!* Trash was strewn all over the floor, and there was grime all over the walls. The two stalls didn't lock. I was lucky there was toilet paper. A sign on the stalls informed patrons of basic bathroom instructions we should all have learned by the time we were out of diapers: "*Estimado cliente, demuestra tu educacion usa los baños bien tira los papeles en los botes de basura.*"

For those who don't *habla*: "Dear clients, show your education use the bathrooms well throw away toilet paper in the trash cans." It's as if ;Ask a Mexican! came to life!

The rest of the bar, thankfully was relatively clean for a dive. Other than whatever fluids the two lovebirds and their voyeur may have left on the floor, of course.

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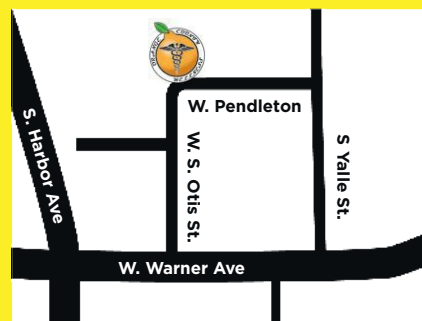
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By Rob Breznys

ARIES (March 21-April 19): I'm not a big fan of fear. It gets far more attention than it deserves. The media and entertainment industries practically worship it, and many of us allow ourselves to be riddled with toxic amounts of the stuff. Having said that, though, I do want to put in a good word for fear. Now and then, it keeps us from doing stupid things. It prods us to be wiser and act with more integrity. It forces us to see the truth when we might prefer to wallow in delusion. Now is one of those times for you, Aries. Thank your fear for helping to wake you up.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): "Poetry might be defined as the clear expression of mixed feelings," wrote W.H. Auden. If that's true, then your job is to be a poet right now. You seem to be awash in a hubbub of paradoxical inclinations, complete with conflicting desires and mismatched truths. There's no shame or blame in that. But you do have a responsibility to communicate your complexity with honesty and precision. If you can manage that, people will treat you with affection and give you extra slack. They might even thank you.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): What can you do to improve your flow? Are there obstructions in your environment that keep you from having a more fluidic rhythm? Do you harbor negative beliefs that make it harder for life to bestow its natural blessings on you? Now is the time to take care of glitches like these, Gemini. You have more power than usual to eliminate constrictions and dissolve fixations. Your intuition will be strong when you use it to drum up graceful luck for your personal use. Be aggressive. Be bold. Be lyrical. It's high time for you to slip into a smooth groove.

CANCER (June 21-July 22): In the beginning of his novel *The White Castle*, Orhan Pamuk offers this meditation: "To imagine that a person who intrigues us has access to a way of life unknown and all the more attractive for its mystery, to believe that we will begin to live only through the love of that person—what else is this but the birth of great passion?" How do you respond to this provocative statement, Cancerian? Here are my thoughts: On the one hand, maybe it's not healthy for you to fantasize that a special someone can give you what you can't give yourself. On the other hand, believing this is true may inspire you to take an intriguing risk that would catalyze invigorating transformations. Which is it? Now is a good time to ruminate on these matters.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Canadians Tommy Larkin and Stephen Goosney are biological brothers, but they were adopted by different families when they were young. They lost touch for almost 30 years. Once they began looking for each other, it didn't take long to be reunited. Nor did they have to travel far to celebrate. It turns out that they were living across the street from each other in the same small town in Newfoundland. I foresee a metaphorically similar experience in your future, Leo. When you get reconnected to your past, you will find that it has been closer than you realized.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): This will be an excellent week for you to talk with yourself -- or rather, with yourselves. I'm envisioning in-depth conversations between your inner saint and your inner evil twin . . . between the hard worker and the lover of creature comforts . . . between the eager-to-please servant of the greater good and the self-sufficient smartie who's dedicated to personal success. I think that in at least some of these confabs, you should speak every word out loud. You should gesture with your hands and express colorful body language. It's prime time for your different sub-personalities to get to know each other better.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): In the coming week you will probably have more luck than

usual if you play keno, craps, blackjack, bingo, or roulette. People who owe you money will be inclined to pay you back, so you might want to give them a nudge. I won't be surprised if you find a \$20 bill lying on the sidewalk or if a store cashier accidentally gives you way too much change. In the wake of these tendencies, your main assignment is to be alert for opportunities to increase your cash flow. For example, if you wake up in the middle of the night with an idea for boosting your financial fortunes, I hope you will have a pen and notebook by the bed to write it down.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): "Not for all the whiskey in heaven," begins a poem by Charles Bernstein. "Not for all the flies in Vermont. Not for all the tears in the basement. Not for a million trips to Mars. Not for all the fire in hell. Not for all the blue in the sky." Can you guess what he's driving at? Those are the things he will gladly do without in order to serve his passion. "No, never, I'll never stop loving you," he concludes. According to my understanding of your astrological cycle, Scorpio, now is a good time for you to make a comparable pledge. What is the one passion you promise to devote yourself to above all others? And what are you willing to live without in order to focus on that passion? Be extravagant, pure, wild, and explicit.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Dmitri Razumikhin is a character in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment*. His surname is derived from the Russian word for "reason." At one point he makes a drunken speech that includes these observations: "It's by talking nonsense that one gets to the truth! Not one single truth has ever been arrived at without people first having talked a dozen reams of nonsense, even ten dozen reams of it." Let's make this a centerpiece of your current strategy, Sagittarius. Just assume that in order to ferret out the core insights that will fuel your next transformations, you may need to speak and hear a lot of babble.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): At the 2013 Grammy Awards, actor Neil Patrick Harris introduced the band Fun this way: "As legendary gangster rap icon Katharine Hepburn once said, if you follow all the rules, you miss all the fun." Everything about that vignette is a template for the approach you can use now with great success. You should gravitate toward festive events and convivial gatherings. Whenever possible, you should sponsor, activate, and pave the way for fun. Toward that end, it's totally permissible for you to tell amusing stories that aren't exactly factual and that bend the rules not quite to the breaking point.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Some spiritual traditions regard the ego as a bad thing. They imply it's the source of suffering -- a chronically infected pustule that must be regularly lanced and drained. I understand this argument. The ego has probably been the single most destructive force in the history of civilization. But I also think it's our sacred duty to redeem and rehabilitate it. After all, we often need our egos in order to get important things done. Our egos give us the confidence to push through difficulties. They motivate us to work hard to achieve our dreams. Your assignment, Aquarius, is to beautify your ego as you strengthen it. Build your self-esteem without stirring up arrogance. Love yourself brilliantly, not neurotically. Express your talents in ways that stimulate others to express their talents.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Dr. Seuss wrote his children's books in English, but he liked to stretch the limits of his native tongue. "You'll be surprised what there is to be found once you go beyond 'Z' and start poking around," he said. One of the extra letters he found out there was "yuzz," which he used to spell the made-up word "yuzz-a-matuzz." I recommend that you take after Seuss -- not only in the way you speak, but also in the ways you work, play, love, dream, and seek adventure. It's time to explore the territory beyond your comfort zone.

Homework: Make two fresh promises to yourself: one that's easy to keep and one that's at the edge of your capacity to live up to.

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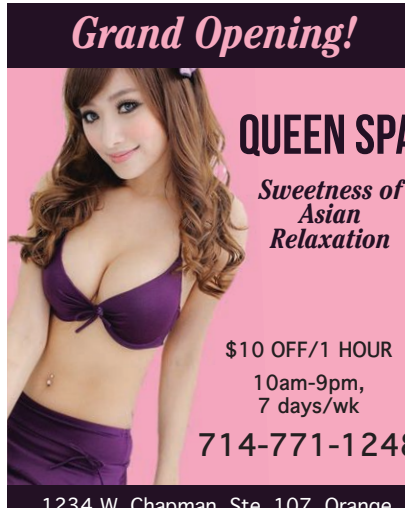
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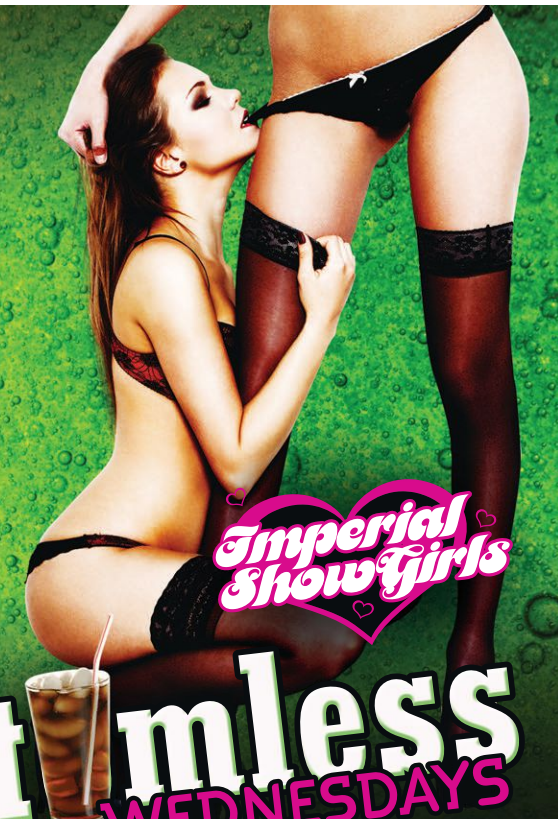
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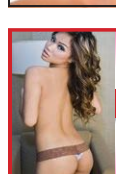
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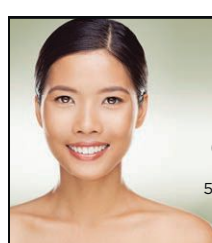
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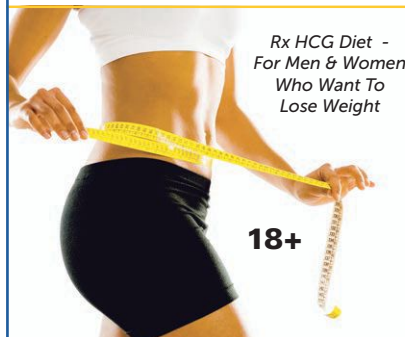
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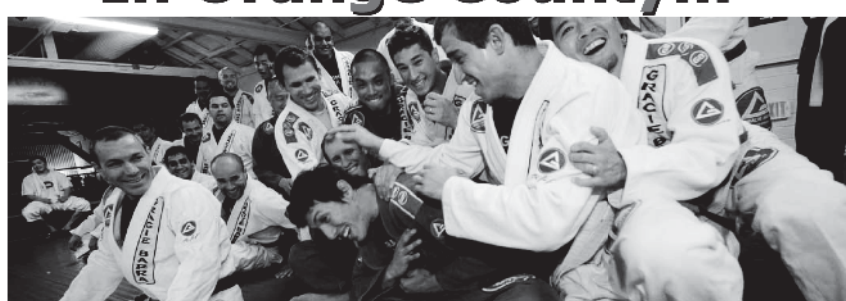
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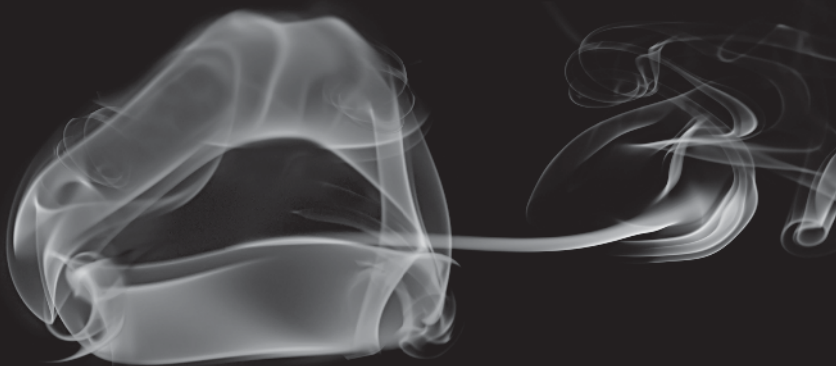
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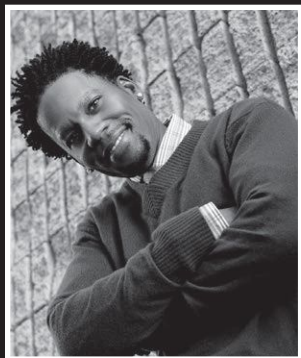


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